

Using your Influence as a Network Group

#### **ABOUT THIS RESOURCE**

This resource is produced by Stonewall. Our vision is of a world where everyone, everywhere has equal rights. We will work until every person who is lesbian, gay, bi, trans, queer + is living free from discrimination, prejudice and inequality, making our shared future safer, fairer and more prosperous.

Stonewall was founded in 1989. It was envisaged with courage, unity and hope, established as an advocacy organisation that would complement the work of other movements campaigning for equal rights.

We deliver campaigns, programmes, and policy work that is focussed on achieving deep, sustainable change, through convening, collaboration, and conversation.

We support parliamentarians and lawmakers; design policies and campaigns and deliver programmes and services which focus on achieving equal rights for LGBTQ+ people.

Globally, we face increasing opposition to the belief that everyone deserves equal rights. It is more important than ever that we stand firm and advocate for what we know to be true: Everyone, everywhere, deserves equal rights

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

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Stonewall is proud to provide information, support and guidance on LGBTQ+ inclusion; working towards a world where every LGBTQ+ person has equal rights. This does not constitute legal advice, and is not intended to be a substitute for legal counsel on any subject matter

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### **About this resource**

#### What is this toolkit?

This toolkit shares ways that your network group can make your organisation more inclusive for LGBTQ+ people. It is intended for a UK audience, but may be adapted to suit organisational needs internationally, in line with local laws.

We explore four topics:

- 1. PROVIDING CONSULTATION
- 2. INFLUENCING SENIOR LEADERS
- 3. EDUCATING ALL STAFF

# 4. COLLABORATING WITH OTHER NETWORKS

In each section there are examples of good practice and case studies from members of the Stonewall Proud Employers Programme. You'll also find exercises that invite you to reflect on how to apply the ideas shared.

There is no 'one size fits all' approach to using your influence as a network group. This toolkit offers examples and ideas designed to be tailored to your context. We invite you to take what works from this resource and use the activities to deliver the best initiatives for you.

This toolkit is part of a two-part series. The second part of the series is our 'Building a Supportive Network Group' resource.

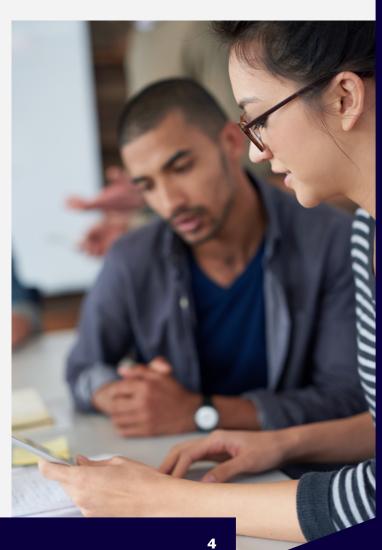
#### Who is it for?

This toolkit supports chairs, reps and members to develop your LGBTQ+ networks as tools for change within your organisation. Whether you are a new network or an established one, we hope that there is something useful to support you to develop your impactful work.

If you work in HR or EDI and want to find ways to support your network group this resource can help you too.

#### **How was it developed?**

This resource was developed consultatively and collaboratively at Stonewall. We spoke to our workplace inclusion experts and some members of the Proud Employers programme. They shared ideas and suggestions about what works across a range of organisations.



# Introduction: Network Groups and Inclusion

LGBTQ+ networks play a vital role in creating inclusive workplaces and are a longstanding part of many workplace cultures. Your work builds environments where LGBTQ+ staff are supported, celebrated and able to thrive. As this work is often done voluntarily we encourage organisations to formally recognise what you do in work plans and appraisals and encourage you to advocate for this.

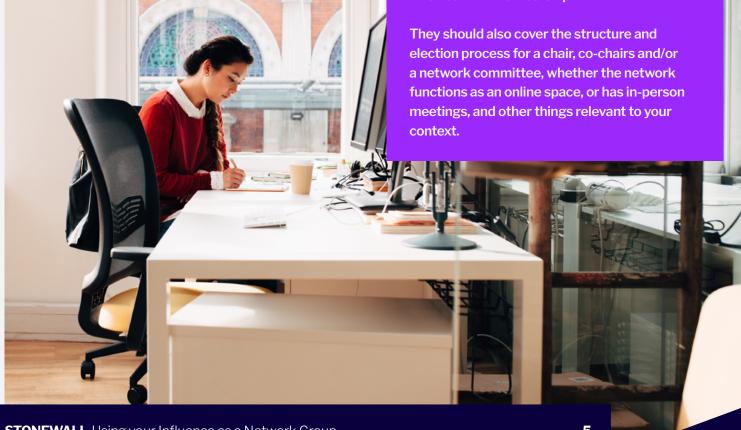
Networks use their influence to create lasting change in an organisation by:

- Raising awareness on LGBTQ+ identities, experiences and inclusive practice
- Consulting on structural and policy change
- Contributing a unique insight from the perspective of lived experience
- By representing the organisation within the community

REMEMBER: Through all of this work, you also have the opportunity to support your network group members' development, by building their skills, knowledge and confidence. In addition to providing opportunities for personal development, the sense of belonging fostered within networks has a significant impact on members and on their ability to thrive within the organisation. Look out for the second resource in this series: 'Building a Supportive Network Group'.

## A NOTE ON YOUR TERMS OF REFERENCE

The way you use your influence as a network should be formalised through your Terms of Reference. While they might look different in each organisation, a Terms of Reference describes an agreed view on how the group will function. They set out your purpose, how you recruit and support members and what is involved with membership.



# Some of the key features of a terms of reference:

#### **PURPOSI**

Clarifying the role of the network group within your organisation

#### DEFINITION

You may want to define specific terms and the way you use them within your terms of reference

#### **MEMBERSHIP AND REPRESENTATION**

Who the network group is open to, how employees become members, and what is involved in membership

#### CONFIDENTIALITY

Outline how your members' privacy is protected

#### **LEADERSHIP POSITIONS**

Elected positions and roles within the network, responsibilities, lengths of term and the election process

#### **OPERATIONS**

How your network will practically operate

#### **CODE OF CONDUCT**

Ground rules for building a supportive and inclusive space

#### **REVIEW PROCESS**

How often the terms of reference will be reviewed

For a more detailed summary and template for building a Terms of Reference, see our **'Finding your Collective Voice' resource.** 



# How to create organizational change

While there are many ways you can use your influence to affect change, the four themes gathered below are areas we've seen people have greatest impact. In each section we'll share good practice, case studies and reflective exercises to support you to apply what works in your context.

# 1. Network Groups and Consultation

We see LGBTQ+ networks making effective impact in their organisations through consultation. This is where networks provide guidance on topics related to the experience of their members in order to help organisations solve problems, improve performance or achieve specific goals around LGBTQ+ inclusion.

When talking about consultation, setting boundaries and agreeing the expectations of the network contribution is important. This will support you to balance including and valuing network expertise with asking your network members to take on additional work alongside their other responsibilities. Some networks find that drawing up an engagement agreement collaboratively with their HR and/or EDI teams supports them to maintain this balance.

#### ACTIVITY

#### CREATING AN ENGAGEMENT AGREEMENT

An engagement agreement or 'terms of working' made between your network and organisation can ensure that everyone knows how to work best with the network.

The document can include:

- Areas of consultation: what kinds of things the network should be consulted about
- What consultation is offered: what it is that you are able to provide
- Practical information: including who to contact, how and what the time expectations are

Using an engagement agreement can support you to work strategically and spread your time and resources effectively. They also support the personal boundaries and wellbeing of network group members.

#### The table below gives an example of what might be included.

AREA OF Consultation	POINT OF CONTACT	WHAT WE OFFER	HOW TO Engage	TURN Around
HR Policies and Practices	Network Chair	Policy and process reviews from the perspective of LGBTQ+ inclusion	Meeting then email	Within two weeks
External communications on LGBTQ+ issues	Comms Lead	Reviewing communications to ensure inclusion	Email	Within two weeks
Internal communications on LGBTQ+ issues	Comms Lead	Reviewing communications to ensure inclusion	Email	Within two weeks
Advice on inclusive practice	Co-chair	Answer questions and provide guidance on events, training, procurement, community engagement	Meeting	Within two weeks

#### **Try it out:**

AREA OF Consultation	POINT OF CONTACT	WHAT We offer	HOW TO Engage	TURN Around

### TOP TIPS

Try to keep to broad headline areas of consultation rather than trying to predict every scenario in advance.

Remember that sometimes things might need a quicker turnaround for reasons outside of everyone's control, it might help to agree in advance how to navigate this.

Recognise that consultation is advice, and your organisation may not be able to action it all for a range of reasons. However, being part of the process is important.

#### CONSULTATION

### **CASE STUDY: ANCHOR**

All of our colleague networks act as a critical friend to the business in various capacities, but our Rainbow (LGBTQ+) Network was instrumental in reviewing our 'Supporting Trans and Non-Binary Colleagues' guidance.

The guidance that existed already was aimed at managers, so we wanted to create something that centred the experiences of trans and nonbinary people and put them more in control. We added sections such as 'questioning your gender identity' and 'being trans at work'. We also added a section on 'supporting a trans person' because the network suggested that various people, while they might not identify as trans or non-binary themselves, may be family and friends to trans people outside of work. This section in particular has been met with positive feedback, with people saying that the advice feels actionable and accessible, allowing them to feel more confident in supporting the trans and non-binary people they know.

Additionally, we were able to provide a more intersectional view on the resources we signposted to. Our other networks helped with this, suggesting that we add specific resources for religious trans people, or trans people from various ethnicities. We also ensured that the inclusion of nonbinary identities was explicit, even from the title.

Having an array of voices that were able and willing to contribute to this project was vital, but more than that, it allowed far more people within the organisation to know this guidance exists: people who may not have read it were given an opportunity to, and found it incredibly helpful; even people in the Rainbow Network said it taught them things they weren't aware of and that they'll share it as a resource for cisgender colleagues too.

Network contributions to projects like this do more than ensure thorough inclusion. It clearly shows the contribution of networks to the wider organisation, and showcases the power that we have as a diverse workforce. It also proves the value of our voices: being able to see change happen as a result of consultation reassures everyone that their voices matter and can create positive changes in a workplace's culture, and that's something that needs to be continually fuelled and stoked in order to flourish.

### 2. Influencing Senior Leaders

Engaging and influencing senior leaders plays a key role in effectively making change. Senior buy-in is crucial for securing resource, support and engagement across the whole organisation for LGBTQ+ inclusion work.

The impact of senior leadership engagement:

- **Defining Norms:** Senior leaders are essential in modelling the behaviours and cultures that define the organisation.
- Visibility: Senior leaders can significantly raise the profile of LGBTQ+ inclusion both internally and externally.
- Guiding inclusive decisions: Senior leaders are in the best position to approve initiatives and influence their peers.

#### **How to engage leaders:**

The specific approach a network group takes to engaging senior leaders will vary depending on your organisational context. This will also likely change over time. It might be that focusing on how you work with a single senior champion is your primary focus, it might be that working with a range of senior leaders in different ways feels like the most effective approach for achieving your goals. Some networks work with multiple senior sponsors who can offer expertise and influence in different areas of advocacy and support.

## Two steps to leadership engagement

- Define clearly what support you need from your senior leadership team and why this is the case (this could be part of your annual action plan or strategy). This can include building a job description for a senior leader, so it's clear what you'd like them to do or achieve in post and they can assess whether they are the right fit for the role.
- Understand what is motivating your leadership team and use a case for support that will engage them (this will help guide your conversations and give you a greater chance of getting buy-in).

#### IDEAS FROM OUR PROUD Employers programme

Some of the things that organisations tell us are impactful when they are working with senior leaders to use their influence:

- Encouraging your senior champion to regularly meet with your network
- Creating learning opportunities where senior leaders can have open conversations in a confidential space
- If your organisation operates in multiple locations, having location specific senior champions to support and advocate for LGBTQ+ inclusion
- Organising events and inviting senior staff to attend
- Supporting senior staff to publish pieces on LGBTQ+ inclusion on your internal communication channels
- Mentoring and reverse mentoring programmes

#### **ACTIVITY: BUILDING A CASE FOR SUPPORT**

A case for support doesn't necessarily mean a formal document for presentation, but will help you plan your conversations with leaders.

All organisations and leadership teams have different priorities and motivations. You'll need to build a case, or multiple cases, that appeal to your leaders' priorities to get them on board.

Your case for support should be evidence based, demonstrate the impact their work can have for employees and the organisation and be tailored to your organisation's needs.

You might want to select an individual senior champion or get wider buy in from your leadership team. This may impact how you build your case for support.

Approaches to a case for support:

#### **WELLBEING CASE:**

A case that shows the positive benefit of network groups on the wellbeing of staff.

- Includes internal and external data on wellbeing for LGBTQ+ staff.
- Clearly demonstrates how the peer support, advocacy and awareness raising work of the network group improves wellbeing for all staff

#### **DEVELOPMENT CASE:**

A case that highlights the personal development opportunities offered by supporting a network group.

- Clearly sets out why supporting a network group is a beneficial development opportunity for a senior leader.
- Outlines how they will also be supporting the growth of junior staff members through the network

#### **PRODUCTIVITY CASE:**

A case for productivity, which demonstrates that employees perform well if they are able to be themselves.

- Outlining that diversity can bring different perspectives to business problems and solutions.
- Includes how collaboration is improved due to a growth in trust, understanding, awareness and communication

#### **EXTERNAL ENGAGEMENT CASE:**

A case to highlight the potential challenges that people could experience engaging with your organisation

- Emphasizing that senior involvement can boost organisations profile as an inclusive service.
- Outline how this can enhance brand loyalty. You can use sector-specific research.

### TRY IT OUT

Write out a case for support that is tailored for your leadership team. You could use research from LGBTQ+ organisations like Stonewall to support your case.

### TOP TIPS

You can choose from or blend the approaches above to best suit what you know about your senior leadership team. 2 You might want to search out statistics and information that specifically relates to your sector.

#### **Reverse mentoring**

Once you've engaged leaders in your work you might want to consider how you help them better understand the challenges and opportunities in your organisation.

Reverse mentoring schemes connect LGBTQ+ network group members with senior leaders. They support senior leaders to develop their understanding of inclusion in the organisation and can offer development opportunities for network group members.

When they work well the impact can be huge, but due to the power dynamics inherent within their set up sometimes there are challenges along the way. To help you consider how, and if, reverse mentoring could work in your organisation we've gathered the below case studies.

#### REVERSE MENTORING SCHEMES

# CASE STUDY: NORTHERN IRELAND CIVIL SERVICE

The Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) LGBTQ+ Staff Network is committed to being an "Effective advocate for LGBTQ+ staff and the wider LGBTQ+ community". This is detailed in the Network's Strategic Framework which is accompanied by an action plan with tangible outputs. One of these actions pertains to the development of a Reverse Mentoring Programme.

The Reverse Mentoring Programme was designed to provide senior civil servants, including all NICS Permanent Secretaries and the Head of the Civil Service, with insights into the experiences of LGBTQ+ staff. The program was carefully designed ahead of its launch in 2013 and paired mentors from the LGBTQ+ community with appropriate senior leaders. These pairings were based on identified knowledge gaps, allowing mentees to receive tailored guidance and perspectives. The mentors shared personal experiences and insights, offering a tangible understanding of LGBTQ+ issues beyond policy discussions.

Feedback from the programme was overwhelmingly positive. Senior leaders reported gaining valuable insights into the impact of their decisions on LGBTQ+ staff, highlighting the importance of considering LGBTQ+ inclusivity in all aspects of policy, even those seemingly unrelated. Mentors also appreciated the opportunity to engage directly with leadership and described the experience as an 'empowering'.

Building on this success, an evaluation of the programme has led to a further three actions which the Network is currently taking forward. The Network is developing a toolkit for senior civil servants with practical steps to support LGBTQ+ employees. Additionally, a second round of mentoring will consider the varied nature of each department and take a bespoke approach. Finally, the Network aims to develop a peer mentoring programme to support colleagues in the community to grow in confidence and become mentors themselves. This will ensure the longevity and sustainability of the Programme.

#### REVERSE MENTORING SCHEMES

### **CASE STUDY: CITI**

Launched in 2021, Citi's LGBTQIA+
Reverse Mentoring Programme is run
on an annual basis, with more than
150 partnerships created since its
inception. Citi recognises that unique
individuals, collaborative teams, and
inclusive leaders have far reaching
impact and are the engines of new
ideas.

A critical aspect to building the right culture is addressing unconscious bias, the LGBTQIA+ reverse mentoring programme pairs senior colleagues with members of the LGBTQIA+ community across the organisation, to support open discussion and provide learning opportunities around LGBTQIA+ issues, both within the workplace and wider community.

Mentors and mentees are sought from across the EMEA region, with colleagues meeting both virtually and in person (where based in same location). Running this programme regionally also facilitates discussion on LGBTQIA+ issues in other locations, which can be a learning experience for both mentors and mentees.

The programme consists of four monthly mentoring sessions, which cover topics including an introduction to the LGBTQIA+ community and terminology, personal experiences within the workplace and wider community, challenges facing the community, and a discussion of ideas

for organisational improvement.

Additional support is available throughout the programme for mentors and mentees with programme organisers who also arrange a midpoint check-in for all participants.

Mentors and mentees have access to internal and external resources to support their learning. Mentors benefit from opportunities to engage with senior colleagues at various states of their ally journey and mentees gain understanding of the LGBTQIA+ community and insight into the barriers those members face. Many mentoring partnerships continue beyond the programme conclusion which is testament to its success and ongoing support of Citi's inclusion goals.

The programme has grown since inception and inspired campaigns to challenge phobic language, raised awareness of issues and barriers facing LGBTQIA+ colleagues and promoted shared ideas from senior colleagues who have been mentees. It supports our efforts to foster an inclusive culture by developing inclusive leaders and empowering allies. We will continue to review, develop, and grow the programme and would encourage other organisations to consider how launching a similar programme could provide insight into their workplace culture and support their diversity goals.

#### 3. Educating Staff

LGBTQ+ networks play an important role in raising awareness within an organisation about LGBTQ+ identities, experiences and inclusion practices in the workplace. Regularly sharing information in a variety of different formats can support with engaging staff on LGBTQ+ inclusion throughout the year.

What makes a good awareness raising activity?

- Clear objectives: Defined goals for the activity
- Relevant to the audience: Rooted in your organisation
- Personal connection: Linked to your members
- Practical take-aways: Provides actionable steps or resources
- Visibility: The activity or project has a broad reach and exposure
- Measures impact: Tracks and has mechanisms to measure impact
- **Creative and innovative:** Able to cut through to gain attention



Working collaboratively with HR and EDI teams plays an important role in developing a holistic approach to educating staff on LGBTQ+ inclusion. We often see great results where networks play a complimentary role with their educational initiatives, alongside more formal mandatory inclusion training that is organised by HR & EDI teams.

Working in this complimentary way allows networks creative freedom to engage staff in interesting and innovative ways. Examples we hear from organisations are hugely varied and can range from tea and talk sessions, poster campaigns, lunch & learns, skill-shares and skills-swaps, newsletters and display boards. What works well will depend on your unique organisational context e.g. do you work in-person, hybrid or remotely? Are you a centralised or dispersed workforce?

# IDEAS FROM OUR PROUD EMPLOYERS PROGRAMME

Some of the things that LGBTQ+ networks tell us work well when using their influence to educate staff:

- Organising educational events: Hosting workshops, panels, speakers
- Sharing LGBTQ+ inclusion materials: Distributing materials as articles, videos, highlighting LGBTQ+ history, sharing examples of good practice in the sector
- Hosting external awareness events:
  Participating in or sponsoring events like
  LGBTQ+ community outreach programs,
  Pride celebrations
- Profiling internal LGBTQ+ role models:
   Highlighting and celebrating the achievements of LGBTQ+ employees within the organisations.
- Rewards and recognition: incentivising engagement by offering rainbow lanyards, badges or opportunities to sign allyship pledges

#### **Approaches to create impact**

These are some key considerations for you to ensure your activities as a network group are having an impact. Thinking about these topics when you begin planning and delivering any activity will keep you focused on your aims, keep activities relevant to your organisation and ensure you are able to adapt your activities based on feedback from previous events and initiatives.

- Ensure activities are linked to your strategy and vision
- Use data to inform event planning and address specific needs effectively
- Have a clear understanding of budget and time allocated for the project
- Choose key strategic priorities prioritise underrepresented communities/groups
- Conduct regular progress reviews to ensure continued momentum and improvement
- Use existing awareness days and weeks to inspire and guide events and projects

#### **Sharing stories**

Personal stories can be a powerful vehicle for creating change. Sharing stories can also be an opportunity for members to share skills and build their confidence.

However, it should never be a requirement for individual staff members to share their personal stories. If you are delivering educational opportunities that involve sharing personal experiences, make sure to consider how you empower people to maintain their boundaries and look after their wellbeing.

#### **Reaching all staff**

Considering how you reach staff working across all areas of your organisation is important but sometimes challenging.

Things to consider:

- Remote staff
- Shift patterns
- Staff in dispersed locations
- Time zones and LGBTQ+ legislation
- Access to technology
- Permission to participate
- Caring responsibilities
- Opportunities to participate anonymously for those who are not out at work



#### SHARING STORIES

# CASE STUDY: SAGE PUBLICATIONS 'PRIDE PROFILES'

To address the lack of awareness around experiences of other marginalised communities and support LGBTQ+ staff with intersectional identities, we organized discussions with leads from the Global Majority, Parents, Prospect Parents and Carers, and Disability, Accessibility and Wellness groups.

To protect the anonymity of LGBTQ+ ERG members, we invited speakers separately and informed ERG members about outside attendance, allowing them to join with their cameras off and names hidden. Discussions were not recorded to ensure confidentiality, and questions were submitted through moderated Teams chat. These talks led to the development of Pride Profiles, featuring voluntary and consented stories of LGBTQ+ staff on our intranet, raising visibility and promoting an inclusive workplace culture.

The Pride Profiles were voluntary and everyone who submitted a profile consented to having their name and photo accompanying their responses online. This has helped with raising visibility of different identities and promoting an inclusive culture at Sage, increasing the comfort of other people to feel confident being open about their identity in the workplace.

#### **Consulting on training**

While LGBTQ+ networks can play a vital role in running events and campaigns that help people across the organisation better understand LGBTQ+ inclusion, this should not be in place of formal training offered by your HR team.

Working with your HR team to ensure that your education offerings complement each other and collaborating on scheduling can help to ensure everyone has the greatest impact.

In line with the previous section on consultation, as a network you might want to consult with the HR team on your formal training offer. You could review and make suggestions around their materials to ensure they truly reflect the experiences of LGBTQ+ people. This could form part of your working agreement.

# Collaborating with other Networks

Collaborating with other networks within your organisation is a great opportunity to maximise your impact and deliver work that reflects the diversity of LGBTQ+ communities.

There are also cross-organisational networks that often work within a specific sector which your organisation may be able to connect with. Working with other networks both internally and externally can strengthen your influence through sharing resources, learnings and support.

# Collaborating with networks within your organisation

One way that network groups can collaborate is through highlighting the experiences of LGBTQ+ people with different intersecting identities. For example, for International Women's Day, working alongside the Women's Network and People of Colour / Global Majority Networks to highlight the experiences of women who are people are colour and/or LGBTQ+. Joint projects could also include collaborative comms pieces such as blog posts, intranet posts, or even producing a podcast.

Examples of cross-network collaboration activities:

- Formal regular meetings e.g. meeting quarterly to share knowledge between networks
- Collaborative education e.g. working with the women's network to highlight experiences of menopause within queer communities
- **Collaborative events** e.g. hosting a panel event for disability history month highlighting the experiences of LGBTQ+ people with disabilities
- Creating supportive spaces e.g. ensuring there is a multi-faith room available at LGBTQ+ network events

#### ACTIVITY

Map out your key objectives/initiatives for the year as a network:

- Where are opportunities to highlight LGBTQ+ people of all identities? E.g. Black History Month
- Where can we involve other networks?
   e.g. consultation, co-hosting events,
   collaborative advocacy initiatives
- What are some simple ways to collaborate?
  E.g. tea and talk session, awareness day
  event
- Who will take responsibility for agreed actions?

#### CROSS NETWORK COLLABORATION

# CASE STUDY: TEESSIDE UNIVERSITY

At Teesside, we have focus groups (or networks) across five protected characteristics, including the LGBTQ+ group. These make up a vital aspect of our efforts towards EDI and widening participation.

After our LGBTQ+ group ran a successful first Pride event last year, the chair of the Disability group expressed an interest in running a similar event. From this, our Intersectional Wellbeing Pride was born!

Our university community - every community - is made up of complex, multifaceted human beings who rarely fit neatly into one box. Therefore, we worked across focus groups to develop an event which recognised and celebrated multiple aspects of social identities.

At our Intersectional Wellbeing Pride, in addition to performances from local artists with intersectional identities, we had stalls run by former students with inclusive businesses, promoted charities and local organisations, and had each focus group chair give a short speech on the importance of intersectional representation in their

context. We also invited students to collaborate with us as event volunteers. One beautiful outcome of this was the newly formed Student Photography Society offering to document the day - they produced a joyful video artefact 'by the students!' All of this served to signal to our wider university community that we support them to come as they are in all aspects of their identities.

Collaborating in this way helped us to amplify our impact as a collective and as individual groups. It strengthened our working relationships as group chairs and helped us really put intersectionality at the heart of what we do. We are keeping this fire burning - for example, we are about to hold a low-stim 'Double Rainbow' (LGBTQ+/ neurodiverse) event for induction week.

## Thank you

We hope you found this resource supportive for continuing to build your LGBTQ+ networks as tools for change within your organisation. The change LGBTQ+ networks make to create more inclusive organisations makes a huge impact. Remember to reflect on progress and celebrate successes to sustain momentum in your work.

We also provide training on this topic. If you would like to learn more, please email us at prospect@stonewall.org.uk.

If you'd like more guidance on running a supportive network group check out the other resource in this series: 'Building a Supportive Network Group'.

