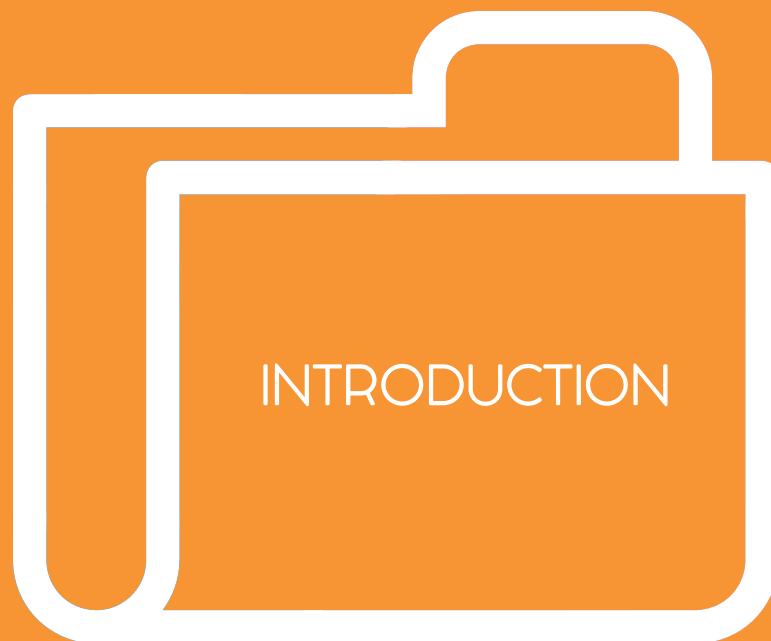




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THE RATIONALE

Developments in Europe pose important questions to the LGBTI movement about the **kind of change we would like to see**. In a time when nationalism and populism win by appealing to fears and insecurities, divisive rhetoric is increasingly normalised and space for civil societies is shrinking. Legal change and political change need to be complemented with profound social change. The way in which we address issues is important and must be based on the values we appeal to and the vision of society we portray. It is about winning people's hearts and minds, people's wellbeing, and it is about building a common ground with more people. At ILGA-Europe we believe that for social change towards acceptance of diversity and equality to happen, LGBTI people and communities must be at the core of the work.

What we ultimately aim to do as a movement is to improve LGBTI people's living conditions, enjoyment of rights, and sense of wellbeing. The claims of the LGBTI movement are based on LGBTI people's daily experiences. For instance the lived experiences of violence underpin the need for hate crimes legislation. Similarly because of the struggles due to IDs not matching gender identity, the movement demands for legal gender recognition free from abusive and undignified requirements.

Organising together is how people, who experience exclusion, discrimination and violation of their human rights, bring about changes in their lives. **Community organisations grow and evolve from individuals** organising activities together. As people continue to organise, connect and support with others, to link-in with the activities becomes a key feature of community organising.

Providing legal and psychological services, organising social and cultural events, running discussions and artistic groups, are ways for organisations and initiatives to reach out to LGBTI

people. Such activities help to collect knowledge about people's experiences of violence and discrimination in society and give direction to our advocacy and litigation work. These activities support LGBTI people to escape isolation, to receive support when they are in need, to develop self and collective awareness, to be empowered in themselves and hopefully to have better lives. This can contribute to them being empowered to take action.

We believe that community organising also works the other way around: the more LGBTI people are aware, engaged, and mobilised, the more LGBTI individuals, groups and organisations are empowered and enabled in their work towards change. Our actions as a movement have proven to be stronger when they are more **grounded in and representative of LGBTI people's realities**. This includes if the communities are actively involved in actions that concern them.

Community organising work is even more important for those LGBTI people who are further marginalised – perhaps because of their ethnic background, disability, language, geographical distance, faith or belief /religious identity. It could also be because they don't see a space for themselves as they identify as bisexual, trans or intersex and the activities being organised seem to be only for lesbians or gay men. Through community work, the many different intersections of identities and realities amongst LGBTI people can be made explicit and more visible. The LGBTI community is multi-faceted and we want to make it an inclusive community of all with 'LGBTI people'. **Community organising is a way to make sure that nobody is left behind.**

Community organising is not an easy task, and LGBTI groups and organisations - sooner or later - struggle with such work.

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It requires determination, strengths, resources and leaders/facilitators. In our experience, successful and sustainable community organising is a matter of vision and strategy, but it is also about **planning and having the right skills**. With this material ILGA-Europe want to continue developing a framework, vision and strategy for LGBTI community organising work in the European region.

In this resource you'll find what we know as an organisation in this moment. We hope that this document will trigger more thinking and learning in the LGBTI movement and we'll be happy to check this information with more experiences from LGBTI community organisers.

Our next step will then be to put together more practices, experiences, ideas and resources, and to make those available to the LGBTI European movement. For this, we hope to hear about your own experiences!

WHAT IS THIS RESOURCE ABOUT AND HOW TO USE IT

This resource is created from the contributions, experiences and **expertise present in the European LGBTI movement**. Over the past few years ILGA-Europe has run several trainings and programmes focused on community organising, observed many projects developed in the region, and had many conversations with activists and organisers.

We have seen that community organising takes **different forms in different situations**. Sometimes it is initiated by a few individuals who decide to do something together. Sometimes there is an existing group of activists who want to engage further with other LGBTI people in their city or country. Sometimes an established LGBTI organisation or group wants to extend its work and reach

even more LGBTI people in their region. Whatever the starting point, all of experiences of community organising contribute to the knowledge, skills and expertise which ILGA-Europe bringing together in this resource.

Particularly relevant for this material is the knowledge from a group of community organisers from the movement who gathered in Budapest in 2016 during a study session. Together we explored the understanding and experience of doing LGBTI community organising. We asked ourselves questions such as:

What is LGBTI community organising?

Why is it important for the LGBTI movement?

How is LGBTI community organising done?

This resource material tries to answer such questions and each section is first of all sharing and suggesting **ideas, reflections, practical resources, experiences**. We became increasingly aware that we can develop the **skills** needed for doing this work and that LGBTI organisations will need to continue doing community organising work as long as there are LGBTI people who want to connect with other LGBTI people. Hence we have collected insights on some skills in the 'How to do LGBTI community organising' section. The material also provides you with some reflections on the many challenges that can come with the job.

Looking at the broad LGBTI European movement, it is clear that there is no one way to go about community organising. There are instead **good questions** to ask, inputs and insights to trigger thinking on the best way to go about it depending on the circumstances organisers find. Hence in each section we have put together questions to trigger your thinking while developing your own community organising work. It makes sense to **strategise** and to **develop plans** for your community organising as an individual and as an organisation. The questions posed in this resource are ultimately aimed at helping you in this process.

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Community organising is an activity or series of actions that people with a common identity or a common purpose engage in to achieve agreed objectives¹.

Community organising includes a **broad range of different types of activities** that people undertake in their communities, to meet the needs of people in those particular settings. All community organising is contexts, cultures and also time specific and it requires setting objectives, and making choices about which actions, what resources and means are used, who the action will be with, and when in time and place.

People who engage in community activities and actions are **community organisers, facilitators and leaders** within their setting – taking a step to contribute to a better life for themselves and others. Everyone can contribute to community organising and together we can strengthen the experience and the skills to do this work.

What we mean by **LGBTI community** can also be different from context to context. Some may argue that there is no one community but many communities; others can find it is more adequate/useful/helpful to talk about LGBTI people rather than community, some use other language, such as queer. For some the LGBTI community includes groups that others call allies. It seems to us that the LGBTI community/ies is more of a fluid concept that organisers, groups and organisations define based on their experience, objectives, needs, and views.

When asked ‘what is LGBTI community organising’ we can also say that **it is about change** – whether for individuals, a community or a society. It is a process of bringing individuals together, to share their stories, to gain support and strength from that sharing. This collective gathering of experiences eventually leads to people further organising to make a change in their community or society so that the negative experiences people

carry will not be repeated for themselves and for others. Thus for instance, advocacy work for legal and policy change is grounded in the collective experience of individuals who come together creating the argument and the energy to push for change.

COMMUNITY ORGANISING AS AN APPROACH TO SOCIAL CHANGE

Models of social change have put community organising work into the context of social change. Here we present the **Community development approach**. It is surely not the only nor necessarily the best attempt to theorise around the role of community organising in bringing about change. However, in this context it seems to us particularly helpful to understand the complexity of such work.

The **approach** was developed in the mid 1900’s. It was used in USA around race relations and race equality, and in South America it was further developed by Paulo Friere into principles for organising, using the lived experience of those experiencing discrimination as the key starting point².

The purpose of community development is to create the conditions so as to have a society where the state, service providers and systems of engagement all contribute to equality of opportunity and of outcome for all. Looking at the development and history of other movements we can see a commonality of actions, focus and values.

We can see this in social change movements for equality on gender, race, (dis)ability, the environment, poverty.

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¹ Find more resources on community organising here:
www.ilga-europe.org/resources/thematic/community-organising/external

² Information on community organising in the context of social change are available here:
www.ilga-europe.org/resources/thematic/community-organising/external

Core principles of community development are:

- **Empowerment** of individuals to take control, to participate and to decide for their own lives
- **Representation** of all people living in a community
- Focus on **collective** interests and demands rather than on an individual case.
- **Participation** in decision-making
- Working in **solidarity** with others who are also affected and excluded.

This approach uses **social analysis of power in society** as a means to guide the direction and work programmes of activists/social change agents. This involves taking time to analyse the situation people are experiencing and to dig deep into 'why' situations exist as they do and to ask 'where is the problem and who has the power to change the situation so the problem is solved?' This results in a realisation that the situation is not the problem of the individual but a more systemic one.

According to the Community development approach **inequality** is experienced at five levels and **changes** will be required at the same five levels to create equality. This means change can be targeted through a number of these identified levels.

- 1 Personal
- 2 Community/Social
- 3 Cultural/educational
- 4 Political - Legal, institutional
- 5 Economic

For example: In terms of social analysis of the oppression/discrimination against LGBTI people can be seen as follow.

- 1 At the **personal sphere** – it is illegal to have same sex partner or there is not legislation to protect intersex people from extreme human rights violations from birth. It is individuals who feel and experience the lack of recognition and

protection. It is the lawmakers who have the power to change this, and society to accept equality of all relationships and self-determination.

- 2 At the **community/social sphere** – the choices for social interaction are very limited/non-existent. There may be no places to meet other people; it may be against the law to rent premises to LGBTI associations/groups/organisations. Again it is a matter of legislation and societal acceptance.
- 3 At the **cultural/educational sphere** – there are few cultural reference points. There may be no LGBTI characters from history included in school text books; there may be censorship of LGBTI characters in books/films/theatre plays; on-line censorship of LGBTI websites. Policy makers as well as professionals and opinion leaders are among the ones to take action against such inequalities.
- 4 At the **political/legal sphere** – policies and legislation restrict access to rights enjoyed by heterosexual and cis people. For example permission to have public gatherings such as Pride marches, or restricted access to legal recognition of LGBTI groups, or to adopt children.
- 5 At the **economic sphere** – sexual orientation/gender identity may restrict work opportunities, housing opportunities, pension rights due to the discriminatory laws.

Community development organisations often form around a group of people committed to using this approach in a focused, planned way. Sometimes these groups have employees, budget and work programmes to advance equality and to challenge the oppression. Sometimes they don't have paid staff but deliver a work programme through the work of volunteers.

The actions of such organisations/groups would be focused at one or more of the following to bring about the changes required.

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- Individual – working with and towards **individuals**
- Communities/Groups – working at the **local** level
- Networking with similar communities – working at the **regional** level
- Networking with broad range of equality organisations – at the **national** level.

When applied to the LGBTI community, this approach can be seen in the work of LGBTI organisations. It can involve interventions in terms of counseling, telephone help-lines, supports for ‘coming out’, social events, gathering community representation for taking legal cases, developing advocacy strategies for legal changes, developing public awareness and information communication strategies, organising cultural and social events for the wider community so as to educate regarding LGBTI lives/history and culture.

COMMON FEATURES IN COMMUNITY ORGANISING

There is an element of **planning, co-ordinating and agreeing** on the ‘what, why, how, where and when we are doing and who is doing’, necessary for all community organising. This links strongly to the organisations’ overall work. Sometimes in the form of work plans and strategic plans or simply as part of organisations and groups’ discussions about objectives and activities.

Building a **safer space** is a shared priority when working with LGBTI communities. When asked about creating a safer space, organisers answered that it is about being open, accessible, inclusive, not using labels, listening and having respect for everyone’s opinion, being flexible and kind with each other and with ourselves, being aware of the space we take, how much we talk in the group, and of our own needs.

Knowing the community or group you want to organise with and for is central to this work: the socio-economic background, where people can met, knowing what are the main struggles and **needs** are, etc. This information and knowledge will influence many aspects of the organising work, e.g. how you reach out and engage, the space you chose to meet in, the activities you plan, etc.

Community organising work is always communicated and announced to some extent. It can be by sending a text to a group of friends or communicating through mailing lists, social media, posters, etc. It is important to **communicate** what you are organising, and to be clear about your **purpose** and **methods**. Communicating clearly will help to foster inclusion and can encourage others to organise differently to meet their identified needs if what you propose doesn’t meet those needs. It is about using the channels of communication that will reach as many people as possible who might be interested in the activity. Some forms of organising might even be virtual/on-line, for example chat groups, instant messaging support groups, email counselling and support.

There isn’t ‘one way’ to do community organising – and it is important to remember that different organisations and groups might want to organise differently. A strong movement for change includes a variety of community organising activities undertaken by different groups and organisations and tailored to meet **different needs** within the community. No one organisation needs to do everything or try to meet everyone’s needs and interests.

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Community organising might be about one person taking an initiative and asking someone else to organise an action. It can be part of the work of a group of activists who want to create a strong sense of community and provide opportunities for the needs of others to be met. Community organising might be the work of an established LGBTI organisation which is funded and has staff to plan and implement the actions of organising within the LGBTI communities.

The actions and activities might be a one off – might happen over a few months, or might be included in an annual work programme of an organisation or an initiative group. **Whatever is your actual situation it is useful to do some thinking and planning before you take action!**

Here are some questions that are aimed to trigger some more thinking; pick the ones that make more sense for you and/or the group of people you organise with.

YOU

UNDERSTANDING YOURSELF IN COMMUNITY ORGANISING

- ◇ What is LGBTI community organising for you and in your context?
- ◇ Who else will / can work with you on this action?
- ◇ Who do you want to reach/engage with this action?
- ◇ What resources and skills are available to the community organising work?

GROUPS

YOUR COMMUNITY WORK IN AN INITIATIVE, GROUP OR IN AN ORGANISATION

- ◇ What role has community organising in the work of the wider organisation?
- ◇ How is the community organising strategy related and inter-connected to other streams of work of the organisation?
- ◇ What are the goals and objectives of your organisation's community organising work? What resources do you have to achieve these objectives? Who are the people leading on this work? How are they supported? Do you have a community organising plan?
- ◇ Have you assessed what people want to do, what is needed to provide for these needs and how the work can be implemented?
- ◇ How do you communicate your plans with the community? How can people provide feedback?

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The community organisers who gathered in Budapest in 2016 suggested a number of reasons why community organising is a relevant and important core element of the work for the attainment of rights and equality for LGBTI people.

Firstly, at a more **personal and community level**, it allows for people to come together, to break isolation and to feel connected with others.

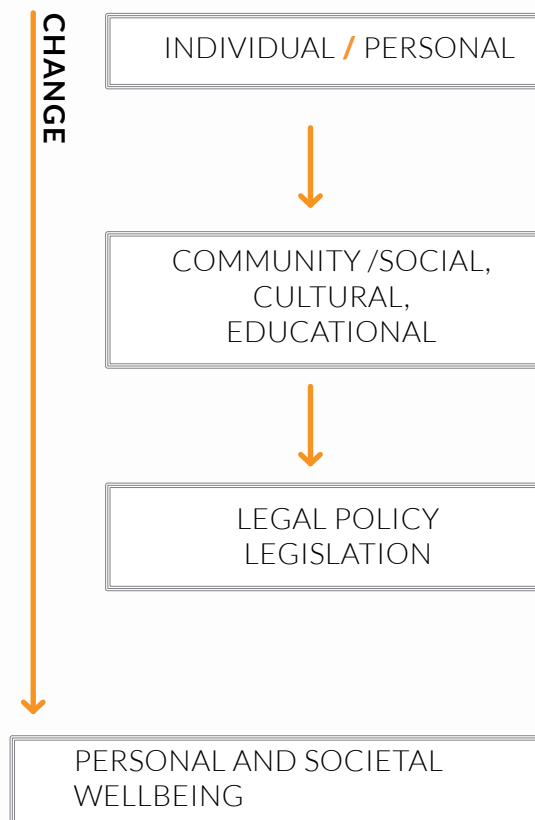
- It allows communities **space to meet**, to have fun together, to share information, to question the discrimination and exclusion we feel, gain knowledge and skills and to contribute to our community by fostering a sense of belonging.
- Community organising provides **support**, facilitates empowerment and self-confidence, networking and creating collective actions to make changes.
- By organising together we can raise **awareness** of the issues impacting on our lives, increase visibility of LGBTI people and issues, fight violence, and find our voice to represent the issues to influence changes in practices, policies and laws.

Secondly, when we begin to organise we meet needs at the personal and social levels, and very soon people identify changes that are needed at a larger societal level. Community organising is a way to **give voice to LGBTI people**, to get to know about their life situation, and to understand their needs. It is about representing and strategising around those needs, to support advocacy and political work.

Community organising is therefore about change – in laws, policies, services, in education and training of professionals, in cultural inclusion and representation. It emerges from people

coming together to reflect on their own conditions, to organise, to plan and to act.

The usual pattern of work on social change begins with an individual, who connects with others, who then plan to work together on a common project, and who use their time and experience to work for change. Over time we can see the pattern growing to include work for individuals to community, to cultural, to legal/legislative and to economic outcomes.



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Why community organising is a key strategy for equality and human rights is based on this strong link between advocacy work for legal and social policy change and meeting the needs of people who are experiencing the exclusion and inequality.

There is a large **overlap between community organising and human rights based advocacy** work which has core principles of representation, participation, accountability, and decision making. Within LGBTI organisations there are sometimes both strands of work – each informing and influencing the other. In other situations one LGBTI organisation provides community organising and services for LGBTI people while another focuses on advocacy work. Both need to find ways of communicating what is emerging from their work, so that the learning and knowledge is shared.



This is only one of the many ways in which community organising overlaps with different work streams.

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A good place to start community organising is by thinking about what motivated you to get involved or to begin some group activities. **Knowing your own motivation** can help engage other people and reminds us that everyone starts from wanting something for themselves. Knowing how social change at a wider societal level comes from people working together to meet their own identified needs can help us as community organisers to design programmes of work that will motivate others.

YOU

UNDERSTANDING YOURSELF IN COMMUNITY ORGANISING

- ◇ Why do you want to organise LGBTI communities?
- ◇ What do you want to be different as a result of the organising?
- ◇ What issue/topic/theme are you interested in organising around?
Who might be interested to work with you?
- ◇ Who are you interested in working with on this?
- ◇ Where can you get support?
How might you begin...even with a small group?

For example, you might want to explore the experience of being LGBTI and having a disability. You might want to start a group for people who want to do sport in an inclusive environment. Or you might be interested in exploring the theories and thinking around gender identity. There are as many possibilities as there are people involved in LGBTI communities!

GROUPS

YOUR COMMUNITY WORK IN AN INITIATIVE GROUP OR IN AN ORGANISATION

- ◇ What community organising work does your organisation do now?
- ◇ When did this work start? Who was involved? Where are those people now? Can you talk with them to get ideas/support? What was the outcome of that work?
- ◇ Do you know what the needs of different groups within your LGBTI community are – for support, for leisure/ cultural activities, for awareness raising, for organising events?
- ◇ How will this work link with the other activities of the organisation? Who else within the wider LGBTI community in your city/country is providing services/ creating opportunities for LGBTI organising? How will you link with them and their work, so as to create co-operation and an expanded set of services for LGBTI people?
- ◇ What resources are available?
- ◇ Can you prioritise the interest in the different activities?

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While there is no one right way of doing community organising, there is general agreement that following some key elements contributes to good organising³.

In this section we are discussing the following aspects:

- 1 Working from core principles and values
- 2 Having and developing some essential skills
- 3 Understanding the many types of community organising activities
- 4 Planning the organising

PRINCIPLES AND KEY PRACTICES IN COMMUNITY ORGANISING

From the perspective of organisers, values and principles underpinning community organising within the LGBTI movement include:

- **Respect** for individual's perspectives and for difference of opinion
- **Inclusion** and **empowerment** of those who wish to join
- **Outreach** to those who may be challenged in participating
- Working for **collective** as well as for **individual** benefits
- **Ownership** and decision making by the people involved
- **Accountability** to others for actions taken
- **Transparent** representation
- **Accessible** and **safe** spaces – both physically and psychologically.

What does this set of values look like in terms of behaviours and organisational practices?

Clear, jargon free-communication about what you are doing, when, where, why: People must understand to get engaged and feel welcomed.

Accessible physical spaces that accommodate different abilities, financial resources, transportation and safety: Think about where you are organising and make sure that people can reach the place e.g. with public transportation, that there are not architectural barriers, that security of participants is protected.

Facilitating people to take part: Think about the time and the day that may facilitate people joining; E.g. if you want to reach out to youngsters in school in the morning they may be in school, and in the evening not everyone could be free to go out.

Ensuring cliques don't form: You may organise group activities based on people's shared identity, such as intersex or trans groups. However, you may also want to consider bringing different groups together to make sure that a broader sense of community and solidarity is cultivated.

Organising with LGBTI communities: Make sure that activities and future direction are based on what people want or need and are not imposed. This will help to create a sense of ownership of the space and of the work done to ensure accountability, and it will likely contribute to cultivate leadership and mobilisation. In practical terms this may mean creating a space to discuss issues and desires; plan together or open the space for planning; but also work on social change decisions, progress, plans etc. to the widest group possible.

Supporting people organising around different interest: Different people have different needs and desires and should be encouraged to organise based on that. Diversity of activities will most likely lead to more people participating and feeling that their necessities are met.

Think of your experience, what else can you do to organise based on these values?

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³ Find info on tools for community organisers here
www.ilga-europe.org/resources/thematic/community-organising/external

HAVING AND DEVELOPING SOME ESSENTIAL SKILLS

Depending on the activities you are organising – football or a swimming club requires different skills from a support group or telephone helpline – it is important to realise that a **core set of skills** is required, regardless of the type of activity. Community organisers agreed that at some point planning skills, motivation and enthusiasm would need to be supplemented with some other skills related to working in groups.

Firstly suggestions included **facilitation, understanding group dynamics**⁴, and **understanding and knowing yourself**. The way in which we facilitate discussions makes a big difference in how participatory, open and respectful the space is. You can share your position, or you can ask participants their view, acknowledging different approaches and views on things. Is important to know your own limits – and to acknowledge when you need further help, further training and perhaps even when you need to take a break from the work you are doing. There are many resources written in all languages which can serve as guides to developing facilitation skills, understanding what is going on in groups and how you might prepare for handling the dynamics that will emerge. **Self-care** is also the topic of many resources.

Community organisers suggested that understanding your **leadership capacity and style** would contribute positively to community organising. Taking a step into leadership is part of what community organisers do – even if it is not the main motivation for the work. When you begin to organise you begin to exercise leadership. Learning more about yourself in this role, how you find it challenging, how it is satisfying and how you manage the challenges is useful to explore. Again, there are many resources in your own language that might be useful on this if you do some

searches on leadership/motivation/group dynamics/styles of working/leadership/followership.

Thirdly, the community organisers identified understanding and **dealing with conflict** as a core skill⁵. What causes conflicts, how people behave in conflict situations are both necessary for identifying how the conflict might be ‘managed’. It is important to also see conflict as being a normal part of community organising – it happens everywhere, can be managed and can be resolved. Ignoring it is not helpful!

Finally it is suggested that over time if you are involved in community organising, it can be useful to learn more about roles in organisations and in groups and also to learn more about dealing with conflict/difference and the role of facilitating when there is conflict. A major challenge in community organising is dealing with difference of opinion or perspective. How we deal with conflict ourselves and how we facilitate it when it emerges in groups is important knowledge to have about others and ourselves.

Do you have some of these skills?

What do you feel is missing and what can you do to fill the gap?

⁴ Resources and tools on facilitation and work with groups are available here www.ilga-europe.org/resources/thematic/community-organising/external

⁵ Resources on conflict management are available here www.ilga-europe.org/resources/thematic/community-organising/external

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Based on the many conversations we had with organisers all around the European region, we identified different types of LGBTI community organising activities.

- **Support activities:** helpline, issue based groups, 1:1 counselling, support activities, such as legal or psychological support, wellbeing related activities, etc.
- **Leisure, socialising, and cultural activities** including: film or book clubs, sport groups or discussion groups, parties, art festivals, etc.
- **Political work:** Pride marches, IDAHOT events and other street actions were also mentioned as part of the community work. Monitoring human rights violations could also fall into this category.

Activities can happen online and offline but usually the two levels interact with each other. Awareness raising and training have been mentioned as underlining community work.

Different types of community activities serve **different purposes**. For instance one may organise a monthly party to create safe space for LGBTI people to come together, socialise, have fun, meet partners. A group may focus on providing psychological support to LGBTI people so that they can get professional help to deal with experiences of exclusion or internal homophobia.

Different activities most of the time also **intersect**. Monthly parties can be places where services like the psychological support are advertised. Psychological support can provide information on human rights violation that may bring new force to advocacy work of organisations and groups. Community members can then participate in socialising activities or/and get support through a certain service to eventually get involved in activism.

What is the purpose of your organising and what type of activity would best serve that purpose?

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There isn't one way to plan your work around community organising. The extent of your planning and thinking depends on how many people are involved, which resources are available (time, energy, places, skills, money, etc.), previous experiences, etc. However it is always worth spending some time to think through some key aspects of your organising work. In fact, while organising an activity spontaneously can work, it is usually better in the longer term to think about a few key questions first, and then make a plan.

These questions can be useful for a one-off event or for a bigger planning exercise of your organising over a period of time.

What

What is it that you want to do? Go back to the 'What questions'

Why

What is **motivating** you to do this activity? Revisit the 'Why questions' about your motivation and think about your **goals**. Why do you think this is an activity that is wanted/would be useful/would be interesting/would be fun? Have you asked other people if they are interested? Focus on the **needs** you know about or think at people you could talk to in order to get to know more.

Who

What are the **steps** of your organising?

Who would you like to take part in the activity? What is the **target**

community you want to reach out and engage?

Who will work with you on the activity? Is there a

co-facilitator or a **co-organiser** you work with?

What is the **role of LGBTI people** you would like to reach out and engage in the planning and implementing of activities?

How will the activities or series of activities look like?

How

How will people know this activity is being organised? How do you think to **communicate** with your target group?

How will you contact/**reach out** people so they know this is happening? Is the language you plan to use inclusive, respectful, open? How will you reach people who don't usually come to LGBTI events?

Where

Where will this activity take place? Is this an easy place to get to?

Can you advertise the venue? Is the venue **safe**? Is the venue **accessible** for people with restricted mobility/sight or hearing loss? Is the venue **open** to trans / gender non-conforming people? To women?

When

When will the activity take place? It is a one-off event or regular?

How will you know what is the **most suitable** time for people?

Once you have answered these questions you are in a better place to begin putting a plan together. It is important to assess to what extent what you have planned is in line with the **values**

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and principles you organise around. Go back to the section on principles and practices in community organising.

GROUPS

YOUR COMMUNITY WORK IN AN INITIATIVE GROUP OR IN AN ORGANISATION

When it comes to groups and organisations, a further consideration that emerges is the importance of LGBTI organisations and groups to **connect community organising with other streams of work**; sometimes in the form of work plans and strategic plans or simply part of organisations and group' discussions about objectives and activities.

Either way it is very important that if the work is within an LGBTI organisation or group then the questions above should be answered in the full group, and there needs to be agreement on the **strategy of community organising** being connected to the other strategies of the organisation. Go back to the 'Why questions' for groups. Other questions are

- ◇ Why is community organising important for your work as an organisation?
- ◇ What are the links between the different strategies of the organisation? How do the different strands of work inform and influence the others?
- ◇ How is the experience from community organising brought into the other strategies of the organisation?
- ◇ What are the needs the organisation is trying to meet? How do you know about these needs and how could you get to know more over time?
- ◇ What are the different approaches that could be taken to meet these needs?

- ◇ Who will lead on the activities/on the strategy? Do they have the relevant skills?
- ◇ How will they be supported in the work?
- ◇ How will you review whether your work is working?

It may be that overtime as a community organiser you begin to realise that planning and doing the activities isn't enough. You also need to **know about yourself**, groups, intra-personal development, inter-personal challenges and the dynamics within a community of people who have only a gender identity, sexual orientation and sex characteristics in common. Some people find it helpful and useful to do peer mentoring/coaching if they are community organisers so that there is an opportunity for on-going development and de-briefing of challenging situations.

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In the following chapter we provide three examples of how community organising can be planned.

A ONE TIME ACTION

What

Together with a group of friends/organisers (it could also be an informal group or an organisation) you decide to host some actions around International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia. (IDAHOT). You put together some ideas and decide to have three different activities during the day:

- 1 a gathering for the community,
- 2 communication towards the LGBTI community;
- 3 broader society communication

Why

IDAHOT is for your group an important occasion to create awareness of the situation of LGBTI people in the country. You believe it would be a great opportunity for people to gather and feel connected. In fact you have heard from LGBTI people about the importance of such occasions; or maybe you have asked friends and acquaintances and there is interest in this kind of event.

How

- 1 A day time social gathering – project a series of short movies and use this opportunity to discuss about LGBTI phobia.
- 2 Communication to LGBTI community on website and social media.

- 3 Public awareness with press release and getting facts and data about LGBTI people in your country from European based researches (e.g. ILGA-Europe Annual Review)

The group of organisers would like to invite the whole LGBTI community to participate, but from experience you know it is usually mostly gay men who participate in such events. Hence you got in contact with other groups (e.g. an informal group of trans people at the university, a lesbian organisation). They agreed to work together with you on the event; to develop a shared communication, to suggest short movies and to co-facilitate the event.

For each activity a task list is created and people volunteer to take on tasks – reporting back to each other week by week/day by day.

Resources

Money, press release writer (and data for the press release), contacts with media, venue (accessible and in a place in the city that can be easy to reach), short movies, facilitators, social media communication developer.

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A SERIES OF ACTIVITIES

You are part of an LGBTI group, which organises sports activities for the wider LGBTI community of people. You decide to create a six month calendar with some events happening weekly, and others, monthly.

Why

From feedback you and your group have received during and after several sport events, you realise that people would enjoy more continuity around such events and that people seem ready to take responsibility around it.

You realise it is about providing a range of different sports/ social activities for the LGBTI people in your area; to encourage different people to facilitate the activities; to encourage on-going planning and review of the activities at the end of each cycle.

How

You decide to ask participants in the sports events who are interested to meet to develop a longer term plan and to see if more people can share the responsibility to plan.

During the meeting you develop a plan and people choose where they'd like to have a role. You assess together what different people need to implement the plan and for the first month people who have more experience will support those who have just become involved. Finally you also decide to touch base after two months to make sure that things are going well.

At the end of the six months you review the attendance at the events, the satisfaction with the programme and begin to create the next calendar of events according to the feedback. To do so, you think of organising a gathering with LGBTI community participating in the sports event.

You have put together an overview where you outline who does what and when. One person is appointed to keep track of everything that is happening, including the overall calendar of activities. You also agree that organisers should let others know if something changes or if some extra help is needed.

Resources

In this case you already have some experience, venues, communication channel. It is about making all of this available for the new events.

A COMMUNITY ORGANISING STRATEGY

What

An LGBTI organisation is funded for two years working in the capital city. The organisation decided to support the engagement and inclusion of LGBTI people in 4 cities/towns outside the capital in response to requests from people in the other towns. Through research, you want to design and deliver a community organising plan to meet the needs of LGBTI people in A, B, C, and D towns.

Why

For some time now more and more LGBTI people participating in the organisation's events and activities speak about the fact that there is no LGBTI group in other cities and that it would be very good to develop more groups, as LGBTI people are left alone in often very conservative contexts. Quite often these are cities that LGBTI people leave to move to the capital. Your organisation's hotline service keeps on receiving calls from people living in

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areas outside the capital, speaking about loneliness and lack of any social opportunity.

How

You create a group within the organisation to develop a strategy for expanding work in other cities. Steps identified are.

- 1 Consultation with individuals and social groups and with other human rights/service organisations – this should help create an understanding of how to approach work in such contexts, identify potential allies and some help.
- 2 Identify who will work with your organisation in each town perhaps involve people who now live in the capital but who still have contacts in towns A, B, C, D; or through the consultation held see if people (or other trusted organisations) are interested in being involved.
- 3 Organise social events to start gathering LGBTI people. Once a month or bimonthly an event is organised. You take all possible precautions for people to feel comfortable in joining.
- 4 All of the conversations, meetings, gatherings with LGBTI people you support or participate in are an opportunity to understand what the reality is, what are the needs, and if there is room for doing more.
- 5 Based on the experience and the knowledge and information gathered, you begin to generate a new work plan, which is developed first and foremost by the LGBTI people in A, B, C, and D who will implement the plan.

Resources

You need some money (to travel to cities, for the venues, to make phone calls, etc.); you need people who are willing to commit for some time in this work.

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Community organising is challenging work! This is the consensus of many organisers we heard from. Organisers observed the challenges described below

- Being new/nervous about starting something
- Not being accepted as someone who has the 'right' to do the work
- Skills gaps
- People not responding to suggestions
- People not volunteering to be involved
- Conflicts between people in the groups
- Getting burned out from over working;
- Finding time with the day-job
- Not enough funding
- No spaces that feel safe to meet
- Everything happening in the big cities
- Social events all linked to alcohol
- Gay events only – not much options for lesbian, bisexual, intersex or trans people
- Hostility/rivalry from other LGBTI organisations
- Egos of some people involved
- Not agreeing on a common goal
- People not wanting to plan
- Power relations between some others in the group
- Ex-lovers not willing to work with each other
- Divisions in the community
- Double structures and splitting the available funding
- Misunderstandings
- Racism
- Transphobia and biphobia
- Prejudice against other 'sub communities' – religion, age, physical abilities,
- Isolated communities spread across wide geographic regions

- Not knowing how to approach people from 'sub communities'
- A very politically hostile environment

A suggested response process from organisers involved the following steps:

- 1 Acknowledge that you are experiencing a problem, and define it as you experience it
- 2 Find someone in your group/circle of friends to talk about the situation with
- 3 Check out with other LGBTI community organisers what they do in similar situations – you don't have to re-invent the wheel! Somebody else has had this situation too
- 4 Make a plan about how you might approach the solving of the situation Including how you now define the situation
- 5 Bring other people into the discussion about the problem and your proposed plan for addressing it
- 6 The situation may be bigger than you – get help
- 7 Think of the possibility of ceasing for a time so you can get some additional skills, a co-organiser, more research on what people would like to do and how, where and when.

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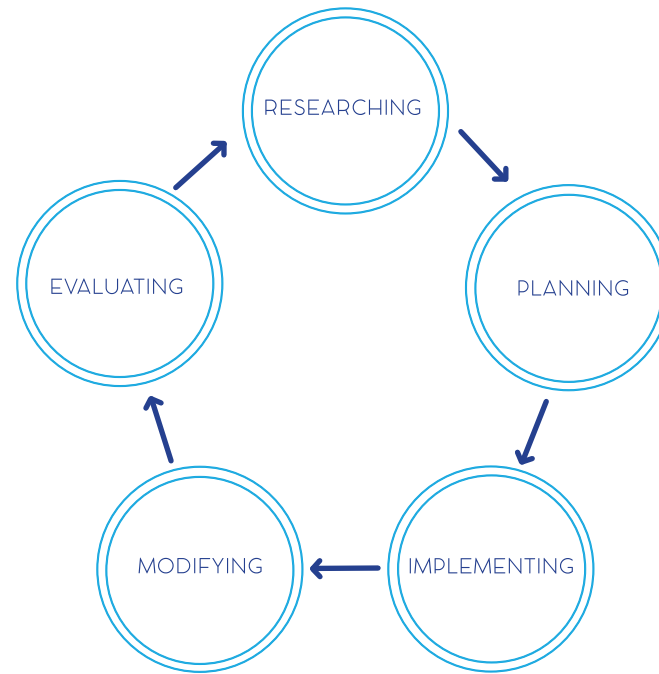
SUSTAINABILITY OF COMMUNITY ORGANISING WORK

Sustainability is about making sure that enough resources are available to continue the work over time⁶.

As for many other layers of LGBTI groups and organisations' work, sustainability is a key element when it comes to LGBTI community organising. This can include finding the financial **resources** to continue with the activities, and in some situations this challenge is met through fundraising, writing funding applications, or having the activity be self-funded by people paying.

But sustainability also applies to the **volunteers and workers** in a group or organisation. The challenge for long term working is to ensure people are supported in the work, and are provided with the necessary resources to do the work. This might be enough time, enough money, a physical space, training and skills, information, appreciation, acknowledgement and opportunity to de-brief. It can also involve awareness of the ways in which taking leadership is often 'attacked' or challenged by others in a community, and how to address this situation if it happens. Community organisers may also be confronted with personal issues from community members, which can be difficult to cope with. **Self-care** is an important feature of community organising.

A related element of sustainability of the activists/leaders is to find ways to encourage **others to take leadership** and to develop the confidence and skills of others who would like to engage in community organising.



And finally, sustainability of organisations and groups is important to nurture. This usually involves taking time to review the work, to identify achievements, to acknowledge the contributions of everyone and to evaluate the progress on the plans. Groups and organisations need time to reflect, plan, do the work. Following an **Action Cycle Model**, as described in the graph above, supports the people in an organisation which contributes to the sustainability of the organisation.

Obviously organisations also need to have the funding and the skilled and experienced people to deliver on the plans that are created. An important reflection is that if the resources don't exist then the plan has to be modified.

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⁶ More on organisational development and planning is available here
www.ilga-europe.org/resources/thematic/community-organising/external



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Visit our website for more resources on LGBTI community organising

[www.ilga-europe.org/resources/thematic/
community-organising](http://www.ilga-europe.org/resources/thematic/community-organising)