LGBTIQ Volunteers: Inclusive Practice
Guide

Volunteering VICTORIA

Treating volunteers equally does not necessarily mean all volunteers will have their needs met; an inclusive practice will accommodate the specific needs of those most vulnerable and marginalised.

Volunteering Victoria values diversity and recognises the importance of an organisational culture that allows all volunteers to participate fully and equally in the workplace and in the community. It is estimated that Australians who identify as LGBTIQ may account for up to 11 per cent of the national population (Australian Government). Despite this significant representation, studies show that members of the LGBTIQ community in Australia face significant discrimination and social exclusion and that these factors contribute to poor outcomes for their health and general wellbeing (Leonard et al. 2012). Adopting inclusive practice frameworks for all LGBTIQ people in an organisation is vital if the equal participation and safety of LGBTIQ volunteers is to be achieved.

Groups within LGBTIQ identities

When considering inclusivity of LGBTIQ volunteers, it is important to be mindful of intersectional factors relating to race, age, cultural background, ability and circumstances.

The volunteer sector is comprised of many older people who are drawn to the social connections and feeling of purpose that volunteering can bring. Studies show that older LGBTIQ people have experienced historical stigma and persecution that would not be commonly experienced today (ACAS 2015).

Due to their experience, many older LGBTIQ people choose not to reveal their sexuality and/or gender identity or intersex status. Additionally the term 'queer' may be offensive to some older LGBTI people. It is not safe to assume that because older volunteers have not identified as other than heterosexual and/or cisgendered, that there are no LGBTIQ people involved. It is better to create a culture of safety, inclusivity and respectfulness for the rights of LGBTIQ people, to ensure that everyone already involved can feel included and supported to be their authentic self.

Note: 'Cisgender' refers to a person whose gender identity and biological sex aligns. The opposite of this is transgender or gender diverse.

LGBTIQ related terms

The acronym used in these guidelines refers to:

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer.

Note: 'queer' is an umbrella term that can refer to all LGBTI identities. Be mindful of the fact that for some, the term queer is accepted as a politically motivated, reclaimed word used as an alternative to the LGBTI acronym; for others, the term queer is rejected for its association with activism that does not represent who they are and/or for the fact that the term could trigger past abuse where it has been used in a derogatory way. Referring to someone as queer should only ensue when they have identified as queer themselves.

It is important to understand and remember that sexual orientation, intersex and gender identity are all separate concepts that sometimes overlap. For example, a transgender or intersex person can be lesbian, straight, bisexual, gay, asexual or queer. An example of this is a straight transgender woman who is attracted to men; whereas a lesbian transgender woman is attracted to other women.

Why strive for LGBTIQ inclusion?

LGBTIQ people who volunteer, bring with them a plethora of life experience and resilience's that contribute to organisational culture and the community at large. Additionally, LGBTIQ volunteers can benefit from the confidence, skills and networks they experience which can support them to become leaders in their own communities.

Furthermore, discriminating against LGBTIQ volunteers or staff and services users might be in breach of human rights legislation.

In Victoria a person's sexual orientation, gender identity and intersex status is protected under State and Commonwealth legislation. This includes: The Victorian Equal Opportunities Act 1995, The Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth), and the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Victoria State Government 2017).

Key points to inclusive practice

Ultimately for inclusive practice to be effective for LGBTIQ volunteers, *all* LGBTIQ people in an organisation should have their rights and needs recognised and upheld. LGBTIQ inclusivity should be normalised within the organisational culture at every level.

Create a welcoming environment

Positive symbolic gestures can signal to LGBTIQ people that an organisation is welcoming and safe. This can be an important first stage in building trust and rapport between an organisation and LGBTIQ volunteers.

- LGBTIQ inclusion can be reflected in the values of an organisation. For example the 'About Us' section of an organisations website, or introduction to an employee or volunteer handbook could include a statement of commitment to LGBTIQ inclusiveness.

- Language and images on your website can be LGTBTIQ friendly. Photos of same-sex couples and families as well as heterosexual couples and families would show case LGBTIQ inclusivity.

- Simple symbols of inclusion such as rainbow flags, lanyards, stickers and inclusive posters (see link from GLHV for example) around the work place creates welcoming environments for LGBTIQ people. Search online for LGBTIQ accessories to show your welcome and support.

- Support for LGBTIQ causes and events can be a way of displaying genuine commitment to LGBTIQ inclusivity. Board members from your organisation attending and promoting events such as: World Aids day; Trans Day of Remembrance; Pride March; Midsumma Festival, and Pride Match (AFL) can signal to LGBTIQ people that the leadership of the organisation support their rights and visibility in the community.

Important:

Positive symbolism can be useful for promoting a welcoming environment for LGBTIQ people but this is not sufficient alone for developing workplace safety. LGBTIQ Inclusive practice systems need to be enshrined in workplace policy and continually improved and maintained in order to be effective.

The importance of inclusive language

Words make a difference. LGBTIQ language is always changing. By remaining vigilant to the shifts and trends in LGBTIQ language and terminology we can become better in accommodating LGBTIQ people's needs.

- During volunteer induction and other types of engagement, use open-ended questions and language that is gender neutral. For example, terms such as 'spouse' and 'partner' as opposed to 'husband' or 'wife' avoid assumptions around a volunteer's gender identity and/or sexuality.

- Also during induction, you can use inclusive language on a volunteer application form by including 'non-binary' in addition to 'M' (male) and 'F' (female) to specify a person with a non-binary or Intersex identity. Follow the link for more information on this. You should also include an option for people not to disclose their gender identity.

- Avoid misgendering. This is language that does not match what a person identifies with.

For example, if a person has stated that they are transgender or non-binary in their gender identity, it is important to remember what male or female or non-binary pronoun they use. Non-binary pronouns could include 'they', 'them' or 'their'. Sometimes 'he' and 'she' are used interchangeably to signal that a person does not identify as male or female.

Note: If a person has identified as trans or gender diverse, but has not stated their preferred pronoun identity, you can ask them directly. Use an open-ended question to avoid any assumptions such as: *May I ask your pronouns?*

More information

For more information click for a detailed language guide: from LGBTI National Health Alliance in respecting people of intersex, trans and gender diverse experiences.

See links to: Val's LGBTIQ Ageing and Aged Care (Vic), All the Queen's Men and Alice's Garage (Nat) for resources in supporting LGBTIQ elders and promoting their visibility in the community.

Additional Information and links to services and programs relating to LGBTIQ: Young people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, culturally and linguistically diverse groups, people with disabilities, refugees and asylum seekers can be found at Rainbow e-Quality guide by Victoria Health.

Create a safe environment through non-discriminatory practice

Leadership on a management level is vital for creating safe environments for LGBTIQ people. Ultimately however, LGBTIQ safety and inclusivity is best achieved when it becomes a shared responsibly of employees, volunteers and allies of LGBTIQ people all working together.

- Ensure that your organisations anti-discrimination policy is worded to include LGBTIQ people, and is also inclusive of volunteers. You can state: '*a service-user, employee or volunteers sexuality, gender identity or intersex status should not be discriminated against in the workplace'*.

- Assumptions should not be made about a person's sexuality, gender identity or intersex status based on factors such as how they look or how they sound. It is generally not appropriate to ask a volunteer if they identify as LGBTIQ as this could jeopardise their sense of privacy and well-being.

- When an LGBTIQ volunteer does disclose their sexual orientation, gender identity or intersex status, we can support this disclosure with non-judgemental responses that help them to feel safe and appreciated. Highlighting your organisations espoused commitment to LGBTIQ inclusivity might be an appropriate way of helping to build their sense of safety.

- Ensure that staff and volunteers are educated in avoiding discriminatory attitudes and practices in regards to LGBTIQ people. Information sessions, workshops or team building days including LGBTIQ inclusivity should include exercises where workers are encouraged to reflect on their values and beliefs and how these might influence negative and misinformed attitudes towards LGBTIQ people.*See 'Resources' below for videos and training providers to educate staff and other significant people in your organisation in LGBTIQ inclusive practice.*

Video

Short videos of struggle and resilience from LGBTIQ people, and training videos of best practice when working with LGBTIQ people are available at: GLHV and Q-life YouTube channels.

- Ensure that LGBTIQ volunteers have access to feedback and grievance systems. A volunteer identifying as LGBTIQ, should feel comfortable to raise any issues with a volunteer manager/coordinator/buddy or mentor. Conversely, the volunteer should have access to systems that allow them to raise issues anonymously if they choose to protect their identity. Feedback and grievances should be monitored and acted on accordingly.

It may be appropriate for you to refer LGBTIQ volunteers to support services if they present with challenges to their wellbeing.

Being resourced with up-to-date and relevant information about LGBTIQ services is good practice and broadens the scope of care that volunteer managers can provide to LGBTIQ volunteers.

Resources

The resources below have been included to provide volunteer managers the opportunity to create their system of LGBTIQ inclusive practice according to their means and adapted to their organisational uniqueness.

Some useful (but not limited to) support services that volunteer managers can refer LGBTIQ volunteers to Include:

- Drummond Street Services Queerspace: low or no cost support services for LGBTIQ people

- Victorian AIDS Council - Health and support services for LGBTIQ people

- LGBTIQ carers - Support for LGBTIQ carers

- Zoe Belle Gender Centre – Online support for the trans and gender diverse community

- Switchboard – LGBTIQ counselling (phone or webchat)

Guides

- Supporting transgender people in the workplace from the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission.
- Build Intersex inclusive practice from Pride in Diversity and Organisational Intersex International Australia.
- Rainbow e-Quality guide from Victoria Health assists mainstream health and community service agencies identify and adopt inclusive practices.
- Use the audit tool from GLHV to gauge your organisations LGBTI inclusivity. (see GLHV's Rainbow Tick accreditation below).

Rainbow Tick

[Rainbow Tick](#) from GLHV, is a world's first comprehensive LGBTIQ inclusive practice program where organisations are required to meet six practice standards to receive the benefits of accreditation. Rainbow tick accreditation requires considerable commitment, planning and resources. The audit tool provided by GLHV can help you access the current level of LGBTI-inclusivity in your organisation and identify gaps and areas that need to be addressed. This can prepare you for undertaking Rainbow Tick accreditation, or help you create your own tailor-made systems of LGBTIQ inclusivity in your organisation.

Inclusive practice training

Workshops facilitated by people who identify as LGBTIQ provide interactive ways of gaining practical knowledge in building safe and inclusive environments in your organisation.

Some providers such as [Transgender Victoria](#), [Zoe Belle Gender Centre](#), [Pride in Diversity](#) and [GLHV](#) offer training in generic LGBTIQ inclusion, or speciality groups such as trans and gender diverse people, or LGBTIQ aged care. The [HOW2](#) program by GLHV takes organisations through each of the Rainbow Tick standards and is facilitated over 6 months.

Summary – points to consider

- Only LGBTIQ people themselves are 'experts' in what their identity/s mean for them.
- Creating LGBTIQ friendly symbology helps to create a warm and welcoming environment.
- Inclusive language should be used to maximise participation of LGBTIQ identities and minimise their exclusivity.
- You may need to review your anti-discrimination policy to ensure that it is inclusive of LGBTIQ people and volunteers.
- LGBTIQ volunteers should have access to feedback and grievance systems that are then acted on accordingly.
- Factors such as age, race, disability and cultural background has an influence on how LGBTIQ people interact with others and functions in society.
- Learning about LGBTIQ inclusion is an ongoing process requiring education and training for staff and volunteers.

References

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