

A GUIDE TO HOSTING LGBTQ+ EVENTS SAFELY





In a time where we are seeing escalating disinformation, lobbying, stigma and violence directed at LGBTQ+ people, especially trans people, drag artists and creatives, and those who are gender expansive, it's more important than ever that our communities stand united in supporting one another through our events.

This guide is mainly for LGBTQ+ community groups who are interested in holding events for our communities. We have included some recommendations for allied organisations and have also developed a guide for local councils seeking to host LGBTQ+ events which you can find [here](#).

As LGBTQ+ communities, we know that events and opportunities to connect with one another are integral to our abilities to create safer, healthier communities, and are something we are all passionate about.

At the same time, many of these events are facing pressure from hate groups and anti-LGBTQ+ lobbyists. We have developed this guide to offer tips and advice for some ways that you can make decisions about initiatives and plan your events in ways that support both your safety, and the safety of the communities you work for.

Remember that not all LGBTQ+ events will be targeted with negative attention, and that negative comments on social media do not always result in the physical presence of hate groups at events.

However, it is important to plan ahead and take any threats seriously.

PLANNING YOUR EVENT - WORKING WITH COMMUNITY

As LGBTQ+ organisations and community groups, we know that we are stronger together. ACON recommend working with other LGBTQ+ groups to plan your events and to identify other possible partners. We can learn from one another's experiences running similar events.

ACON can provide a range of health promotion resources that you can distribute at your event that speaks to our range of services for LGBTQ+ communities, including in the areas of sexual health, mental health, alcohol and drugs, safety and inclusion, domestic and family violence and ageing. ACON may also be able to hold a stall at your event to distribute our resources and directly engage with community.

Partnering with government bodies like your local council or your Local Health District can also be useful in deterring potential hate groups, while also ensuring LGBTQ+ locals know about inclusive and affirming local services.

Centring the purpose and goals of your event with your event partners can help make the collaborative planning process smoother.

CONDUCT A RISK ASSESSMENT AND DEVELOP A SAFETY ACTION PLAN

Suggestions included in this guide can support your safety action planning process.

A strong risk assessment process and plan for how you will manage potential disruption will help you to remain proactive and mitigate risks to the safety of your staff/ volunteers and to the community.

The safety action plan should include how you will escalate and respond to any threats.

Consider alternative exits and how you will ensure attendees can get home safely, particularly in the event of disruption.

For example, you may plan for an event organiser to be the first person to respond to disruptive questions/ heckling from an audience, but plan to call the police immediately and lock the doors to the venue if members of an organised hate group attempt to attend an event.

As well as undertaking a risk assessment and action plan that is specific to the LGBTQ+ event you are hosting, it is helpful to develop a general zero-tolerance policy for disruption and hate speech at group meetings and events.

TIPS FOR ALLIED ORGANISATIONS AND GROUPS

For organisations and groups that are not LGBTQ+ community-led, it's important to partner with LGBTQ+ community groups, or organisations like ACON, Twenty10 and The Gender Centre. You may also wish to refer to [Rainbow Cultures](#) and ACON's [Local Regional Community Info Guides](#) as two active directories of LGBTQ+ organisations that may be operating within your area to scout potential partners.

These organisations can provide advice about how to plan events that meet the needs of LGBTQ+ communities and may be able to suggest safe and trusted venues. Strong partnerships can also help any LGBTQ+ staff or volunteers in your organisation feel connected to peer supports.



WORKING WITH THE NSW POLICE FORCE (NSWPF) AND SECURITY TO MANAGE DISRUPTION

Our communities may not always feel safe interacting with police due to direct experience or connection with our communities' history of discrimination and poor responses from police.

If you decide to engage the NSWPF, contact a Crime Prevention Officer (CPO) and a GLO/LGBTIQ+ Liaison Officer via the Crime Prevention Unit (CPU), a specialised team that is part of every command/District in NSW.

NSW Police recommend that this contact come at the early planning stage for any community events.

If you choose to consult with the CPO about a planned event, the level of police involvement will be determined by the NSWPF, based on their assessment of the event.

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You can stay in regular contact with your CPO to report any hateful comments that you receive and to ensure your risk assessment remains responsive to threats.

You may wish to plan for a police presence as a responsive measure, that is, having a plan to call the police if members of a hate crime group attend the event, rather than organising for an officer to attend the event 'just in case'.

If your organisation has experienced a hate incident and has reported this to your local Command/District but you have received a poor response (for example, you have requested a report be made but this has not occurred), you can email safety@acon.org.au for assistance escalating within NSWPF.

Please note that the ACON Safety team can only assist when your organisation has first attempted to report or manage the issue directly with your local Command/District.

If you have been able to file a report with your local Command/District but are unhappy with the service you have received from the police, the NSWPF has an internal complaints process. For more information, please visit the [NSW Police website](#).

If you have experienced distress following contact with Police, ACON offers counselling support. Please contact your nearest ACON office or complete our [Intake Form](#).

If you are planning a large event or receive threats or comments that make you concerned your event could be interrupted by hate, you could also hire security for the event.

If you choose to do this, consider:

- Engaging security personnel from a company with clear experience providing security at LGBTQ+ events

and who have received training in working with LGBTQ+ communities.

- Providing all security personnel with a briefing including a site plan about the event, outlining when they should intervene (for low-moderate risk events, organisers should be the first people to attempt to diffuse tensions before security are engaged).
- Ensuring security is NOT responsible for checking ID or marking off names.
- Asking security to maintain a subtle presence (not blocking entrances in the absence of threats)
- Delegating decision-making authority to one managing organiser, for when security personnel should be requested to intervene in the case of disruption.

This should be communicated to security as part of the briefing.

PROMOTING YOUR EVENT

There are a number of options you can consider when promoting your event.

When naming your event, you may wish to avoid 'buzzwords' that could result in your event showing up in searches conducted by anti-LGBTQ+ organisations.

For example, you may wish to call an event 'Rainbow story time' rather than 'Drag story time' or to avoid the use of the umbrella term 'Queer' in event titles and descriptions. However, language is important to our communities and you should consider the pros and cons of any compromises to how you choose to describe your event.

Consider the audience for your event. If it is exclusively for LGBTQ+ people, you may wish to promote the event only through LGBTQ+ organisations, which can minimise its visibility for unsupportive community members.

However, remember that not all LGBTQ+ people will be connected with LGBTQ+ organisations, especially in regional areas. As such, decisions about promotion should be specific to the location and risk.

If you are concerned about the safety of your volunteers/staff, consider creating a generic email address (e.g. communityevents@community) for all communications regarding the event; so that individuals are not targeted and their personal details are not spread.

Consider assigning the responsibility for monitoring this inbox to an LGBTQ+ ally so that LGBTQ+ individuals are protected from any harassing or abusive messages.

Some organisers also choose to create Facebook events or Facebook pages specifically for the event. This can help to bypass pressure on individual organisations in the case of negative online attention being received.



If you are utilising paid promotions on social media for your event, consider limiting the audience so that they are less likely to be seen by organised hate groups (e.g. only promoting the page within certain geographical areas, or to people who 'follow' LGBTQ+ pages or artists).

Consider requiring that attendees register for your event to receive details of the event's location, rather than including the exact location in promotions.

You can also provide registered attendees with information about the security protocols, accessibility and safety planning you will be following for the event. Other strategies that can be effective in are:

- Monitoring online referral traffic to see how registrants are finding your event. Organised hate groups tend to share information about our communities' events on specific channels such as Twitter, WhatsApp and Telegram. Monitoring RSVPs 'referred' by these channels can help you identify people who have registered to spread hate.
- Adding questions into the registration such as 'How did you hear about this event?' and 'Is there anything you would like to tell us?'. This can help to discern who is a genuine attendee and who may be attempting to cause disruption.

HANDLING DETRACTORS AND HATE COMMENTARY

If you do receive online hate commentary about your event, we recommend removing these comments from the page so that they are not visible to other community members.

You can also block these commenters from making future comments.

If you do not have the capacity to regularly monitor comments, you may need to restrict comments to people who follow your social media page, or to close comments entirely.

If you receive online hate or cyberbullying, you can report these comments on the social media platform, to your police contacts and to the [e-Safety Commission](#).

ACON do not recommend responding to specific hate comments or encouraging community members to.

Doing so can inflame tensions, and for individual community members, can result in them being 'served' more discriminatory content through algorithms used by social media companies to encourage engagement.

Instead, if you receive negative comments, after deleting them, you may wish to make a post generally affirming the rights of LGBTQ+ people and/or your key goals as a group. This sends a strong message to your communities of support, without engaging with hate.



COMMUNICATING ABOUT LGBTQ+ RIGHTS AND COUNTERING HATE

In the face of misinformation and hate, it can be difficult to know how to stand up for our communities without 'giving oxygen' to these hateful views.

If your group or organisation is interested in more resources about how to do this check out:

The Common Cause Handbook- a practical guide on how to engage communities from a 'values' starting point

The Pride in Prevention Messaging Guide- this guide provides examples of how to structure messages that champion the rights of all LGBTQ+ people to be safe and valued

Passing the Message Stick – a First Nations led messaging project with resources on how to build support for self determination for First Nations people

These resources tell us that:

- We can be most effective when we articulate a shared value- like the right to safety, belonging and equality
- Using simple language helps
- We should name the harm being done to our communities, clearly naming those opposing LGBTQ+ rights as hate groups.
- It's important to highlight that these groups are a small minority of the Australian population who want to spread hatred and violence
- Engaging in 'myth busting' by repeating untrue and harmful claims doesn't tend to help- there are better ways we can reaffirm our rights
- We should include clear asks for solidarity and allyship in our messaging and let people know there is action everyone can take to improve safety.

COMMUNICATING WITH SUPPORTERS/ATTENDEES

While hate comments can be distressing, the majority of people who register for or engage with your event are likely to be supporters and attendees in good faith.

If you believe that event participants will come into contact with hate groups (e.g. via a protest against your event), reassure participants by publicly outlining the security measures that are in place. We have also developed some general safety tips for community that you can access [here](#).

If a protest by a hate group is planned, you should be aware that other community members may organise a counter-protest.

If you believe this may occur, work together with your community partners, and encourage counter-protestors to keep a distance, engage safely and avoid actions that can escalate violence (such as tampering with equipment).

More information about peaceful, safe protesting can be found [here](#).

Consider also providing streaming or virtual options for supporters who don't feel safe to attend in person but would like to show their support.

TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF

Planning events in the face of opposition and disruption from organised hate groups can be confronting and traumatising. It's important to prioritise your wellbeing and safety. Remember to:

- Connect with your community for support, and in ways that bring you joy
- Reach out for formal support if you need it. If you have experienced a hate crime, ACON's client services team can provide counselling support or refer you to other supports. Contact your nearest [ACON office](#) to access this support.
- Take a break if you need to. it can be hard to do when our communities are being attacked more than ever, but not only can this be what's best for your safety, it also helps your organisation's sustainability in the long run
- Don't forget the 'basics' of getting enough sleep, water and food



KEY CONTACTS

ACON:

To notify ACON of an event you are planning and/or request resources, please email acon@acon.org.au or contact your nearest ACON office on:

ACON Sydney: 02 9206 2000 (Mon-Fri, 9am-6pm)

ACON Northern Rivers: 02 6622 1555 (Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm)

ACON Hunter: 02 4962 7700 (Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm, with extended hours to 6pm on Tues and Thurs)

LGBTQ+ community members seeking ACON's support services can contact their nearest ACON office or complete our [Intake Form](#)

NSW Police Force (NSWPF):

Engagement and Hate Crime Unit- NSW Police Force can provide education and advice in relation to Hate Crimes and Hate Incidents and are also available to conduct community engagements in relation to Hate Crime Awareness. Ph: 9919 9289, email EHCU@police.nsw.gov.au

Find your local Police Area Command here: [Regions, Commands, and Districts](#)

If, following contact with your local Command/District, you have not been able to make a formal report of a hate crime incident, you can email safety@acon.org.au for assistance escalating the issue.

Local Health Districts:

[You can find your local health district here](#)

eSafety Commission:

eSafety helps remove serious online abuse and illegal and restricted online content. eSafety provides a range of information and tools to manage online safety risks. [You can find out more about how to report online harm here.](#)

DIRECTORIES

Rainbow Cultures:

Refer to [Rainbow Cultures](#) for LGBTQ+ organisations, community groups and services that support LGBTQ+ multicultural communities.

ACON's Local Regional Community Info Guides:

Refer to ACON's [Local Regional Community Info Guides](#) for LGBTQ+ organisations and community groups that operate within regional areas.

Greater Western Sydney LGBTQ+ Inclusion Networks:

Bring local service providers and LGBTQ+ communities in Greater Western Sydney together to explore issues, organise activities and make Greater Western Sydney a safer and more inclusive place for LGBTQ+ people. [Find out more about joining your local LGBTQ+ Inclusion Network through the website.](#)

Welcome Here Directory:

The Welcome Here Project has thousands of members who proudly display their Rainbow Sticker and Charter and celebrate LGBTQ+ diversity. For list of businesses or services that welcome and include LGBTQ+ people please refer to the [Welcome Here Directory](#).

Pride Inclusion Programs:

Pride Inclusion Programs are inclusion initiatives of ACON. ACON's Pride Inclusion Programs offer a range of services to assist employers, sporting organisations and service providers with all aspects of LGBTQ inclusion.

Refer to this list [List of Members | Pride Inclusion Programs](#) for a list of active members who have invested in these programs and made a commitment to furthering their support for LGBTQ+ communities.



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