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Tips for Successful LGBTQ Staff Training Efforts

Training your staff on LGBTQ cultural competency can be a daunting task. How do you ensure that your agency employees are fully competent in serving and supporting LGBTQ children, youth and families? Here are some strategies to help you along in the process.

Assess your training needs.

Complete an assessment of your staff's current LGBTQ competency. Conducting a survey to measure staff members' LGBTQ-related knowledge, skills, attitudes, experience, and perceptions of agency climate will give you a clearer picture of where your workforce stands today, and what additional training is needed.

- The All Children – All Families program provides a [Baseline Staff Assessment](#) that measures LGBTQ competency at the individual staff member level.
- [Self-Assessment Checklist for Staff of Residential Programs Providing Behavioral Health Services and Supports to Children, Youth, and their Families](#). This resource measures cultural diversity and cultural and linguistic competency for residential programs.
- [“Designing a Measure: Measuring Social Workers' Attitudes toward LGBT Youth in Child Welfare.”](#) This article includes a tool on page 49 to measure attitudes (Bell & Salcedo, CSUSB ScholarWorks, 2014)

Engage many voices in planning your staff training and broader diversity and inclusion initiatives. Shifts in agency culture and practice require buy-in at all organizational levels. The way you design, communicate, and implement your training plan must consider the needs of all staff members, so find ways to gather input from varied perspectives early in the planning process.

Tailor training offerings based on the needs of different staff members.

Train all staff members on foundation-level material. All agency employees including clerical staff, top management and any other employees who have direct contact with clients should receive basic LGBTQ competency training. Foundation-level LGBTQ training content includes: key terms and concepts, empathy-building exercises and opportunities to explore unconscious bias, research on the experiences of LGBTQ youth and parents in child welfare systems, and best practices for creating an LGBTQ-inclusive environment. Agencies may choose to make participation in foundation training mandatory in order to ensure that the knowledge reaches all employees. Leadership should consider the agency's current climate as it determines the best methods of engaging all levels of staff in this learning process. Agencies have had the most success when the approach to training is perceived by staff members as collaborative, respectful, and encouraging of discussion and buy-in.

Provide advanced, role-specific training for program and direct service staff. This will ensure that all staff members have the knowledge and skills necessary to support and serve their LGBTQ clients. Advanced, role-specific content should align with the scope of your agency's services. For example, if your agency conducts parent home studies, relevant staff members should receive training on best practices on facilitating the home assessment process with LGBTQ resource parents.

Identify quality training providers.

Access to expert trainers can vary dramatically based on geographical location and political climate. You may find that it is easier to identify providers for foundational content than it is to find experts whose LGBTQ knowledge is rooted specifically in child welfare practices to address the need for advanced, role-specific learning.

When assessing your training options, consider the following:

- **Training content:** Inquire into what is included in the content and discuss how the content will apply to your agency's services. For example, if one of your agency's primary services is parent recruitment, the training should feature material that speaks to best practices on recruiting LGBTQ parents.
- **Trainer expertise in child welfare & LGBTQ competency:** Trainers with a firm grasp in both LGBTQ competency and child welfare are best prepared to provide the caliber training that can make your agency fully competent in supporting and serving LGBTQ clients.
- **Trainer experience:** Determine whether the trainer has experience facilitating trainings at agencies like yours. Factors like the scope of your agency's services and the size of your staff can impact how well a trainer is able to meet your agency's training needs.

National training providers include:

- **[All Children – All Families National Training Program.](#)**
ACAF has developed an expert LGBTQ competency training program that includes up to 18 hours of training content that can be customized for the needs of individual agencies serving children, youth and families. Learn more at <http://hrc.im/acaf-training>.
- **[R.I.S.E. Training Model.](#)**
Based at the Los Angeles LGBT Center, this training program teaches child welfare professionals foundational information about sexual orientation and gender identity, focused on the needs of LGBTQ youth in foster care.
- **[REACHING HIGHER: A Curriculum for Foster/Adoptive Parents and Kinship Caregivers Caring for LGBTQ Youth.](#)** (National Center for Child Welfare Excellence, 2015)
This curriculum offers information about the needs of LGBTQ youth to help prepare foster, kinship, and adoptive parents to care for LGBTQ youth.
- **[National LGBT Curricula and Training Materials.](#)** (Center for the Study of Social Policy)
The website provides a variety of training resources for child welfare professionals and parents that cover topics ranging from caring for LGBTQ youth to the experiences of LGBTQ homeless youth.
- **Online Learning Offerings.**
Many behavioral health and child welfare training providers offer basic LGBTQ training and webinars.
 - All Children – All Families regularly offers a [90-min "Introduction to LGBTQ Competency" webinar.](#)
 - The Center for the Study of Social Policy offers recorded webinars [here.](#)
 - The Child Welfare Capacity Building Collaborative Center for States compiles recorded webinars [here.](#)

Find local providers among these common sources:

- **[Local LGBTQ Community Centers.](#)**
Many communities have a local LGBT Center nearby. These organizations may have staff who provide trainings to local agencies, or know of the expert trainers in your area. For a list of these centers check Center Link – The Community of LGBT Centers at www.lgbtcenters.org.
- **Local LGBTQ Youth Centers.**
Lambda Legal maintains a [list of state and national resources](#) for LGBTQ young people both in and out of care.
- **State LGBTQ Organizations.**
There are often state-wide advocacy organizations for LGBT concerns that may also be able to point you in the direction of local trainers and experts.
 - Visit [Equality Federation](#) to find your state group.
 - [Equaldex](#) is another listing of LGBT groups, which may provide training or connect you to an expert in your area.
- **Local colleges/universities.**
Institutions of higher education often house diversity initiatives, gender studies programs, and student support groups that may have the expertise you are looking for, or that can recommend a provider near you.
- **Word of mouth.**
You might start with your agency's current organizational partners and ask them if they have internal expertise surrounding the LGBT community, or if they know another individual or group who does. For example,

attorneys who have successfully facilitated adoptions with same-sex couples in your area may be able to provide some guidance to your staff about local laws and policies that affect those families.

Conduct LGBTQ training on an ongoing basis.

A one-time agency-wide training effort will meet training needs temporarily; however, continued training efforts are necessary due to staff turnover and the evolving nature of best practices in LGBTQ inclusion.

At a minimum, agencies should ensure that all new hires receive LGBTQ competency training. You may want to develop your own agency-specific LGBTQ training for new employees, or perhaps require your employees to participate in LGBTQ introductory trainings offered by another provider. Some agencies find ways to integrate content on sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression (SOGIE) into existing orientation material on the agency's policies and practices around cultural diversity and fluency. Other agencies find it is best to add SOGIE content as a separate orientation component for all new hires.

Look for “low hanging fruit” when integrating LGBTQ content into current staff learning opportunities.

Your agency may already have routine methods for facilitating ongoing staff learning, whether formal or informal. These activities may include case discussions during team meetings, brown bag “lunch and learn” sessions focusing on a specific topic, film screenings followed by a team discussion as part of a diversity series, etc. Rather than recreating the wheel, work to embed LGBTQ-specific content into these activities.

Consider a variety of sources when planning ongoing learning. When conducting foundation-level training for your staff, you may have formed relationships with providers who can assist you with ongoing learning and staff development. Engage the local and national experts you've found for their advice on further training opportunities. Here is an example of how one agency pieced together a series of ongoing staff development activities related to LGBTQ competency:

- **Online-learning offerings from local and national providers.**

All agency staff were required to participate in ACAF's 90-min “Introduction to LGBTQ Competency” webinar which served as an introduction for new staff and a refresher for existing staff. The agency also registered select staff members for webinars conducted by a reputable behavioral health training provider. Topics included “Advanced Practice with LGBTQIA Youth” and “Exploring Identities under the Umbrella Term, “Transgender.”

- **Partner organizations' training activities.**

Agency sent select staff members to participate in live, classroom training on “Best Practices Serving LGBTQ Parents,” that a neighboring agency hosted. To spread the knowledge, those staff members then led a small in-service training with their department colleagues.

- **LGBTQ-related workshops at local or state conferences.**

Agency sent select staff members to participate in a local conference on serving LGBTQ youth that a nearby agency hosted. Similar to the above example, those staff members then conducted a small in-service training with their department colleagues to share what they learned.

- **In-service trainings on LGBTQ topics.**

This agency had a staff member lead a training during which a video on LGBTQ youth in foster care was viewed followed by a thorough, facilitated discussion during which staff members shared real-life case scenarios with colleagues to brainstorm appropriate action.

- **Distribution of LGBTQ resources.**

The agency identified a staff team charged with finding and sharing new LGBTQ-related research, articles, best practice briefs, and resources to all relevant staff.

Consider building internal capacity with a Training of Trainers.

Agencies often weigh the costs and benefits of relying on outside experts for ongoing staff training versus those of investing in the development of internal experts capable of delivering LGBTQ cultural competency. The upfront

investment of time and funds may be significant when committing to internal trainer development but the benefit of having internal trainers are numerous and long-lasting.

Things to consider include:

- **Number of staff.**
Agencies with a large number of employees may find that relying on outside trainers to offer training to their entire workforce requires a prohibitive amount of financial and logistical resources. The availability of internal LGBTQ trainers allows for flexibility in funding, scheduling, and executing training initiatives.
- **Current staff training capabilities.**
Agencies that already employ or contract with experienced trainers are most likely to have the infrastructure and processes in place for developing LGBTQ trainers and training initiatives.
- **Access to potential trainers with existing LGBTQ competency.**
Agencies who have staff members or community partners with a high level of LGBTQ cultural competency and fluency who apply to be prospective trainers are likely to make the most efficient transition to the LGBTQ trainer role.

Additional Resources

All Children – All Families maintains an comprehensive Resource List for serving and supporting LGBTQ children, youth and families at www.hrc.org/acaf-resources. This list includes studies and reports relevant to the field, guides to best practice, and training resources.

For more information on All Children – All Families, or on how to secure quality LGBTQ training for your agency, email acaf@hrc.org.