

A Step-By-Step Toolkit Starting a Family Group



Introduction

Family groups are the heart of *Family Equality Council*. They are formal and informal groups of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) parents, families, and those considering parenthood who organize social, educational, and advocacy-based activities for their communities. People involved in family groups may be partnered, single, considering parenthood, pregnant, parenting, and/or awaiting adoption or surrogate birth. Some groups are quite large and have become non-profits, while others are smaller groups of families that meet monthly for potlucks and/or other child-friendly social opportunities. Most are volunteer-run and serve to connect and strengthen our families.

With the evolution of social media and online networks, virtual and in-person LGBTQ family groups have sprung up across the country. While many of our community's families have access to local family groups, there are still pockets of isolation throughout the country. We encourage volunteers to start up and maintain groups, and we can help! *Family Equality Council* is here to help launch LGBTQ family groups in rural, urban, and suburban areas.

A Step-By-Step Toolkit

Starting a Family Group

STEP 1

Assessing Community Needs



Congratulations! You decided to start a family group. Let's start by looking at your community and their needs.

- 1 How do you define your community? Is your community local and in-person or virtual with regional, national and international members?
- 2 What are the needs you see in your community?
- 3 As the group leader, what gaps are you hoping to fill by starting this group?



STEP 2

Defining Your Family Group



Now that you have defined your community, let's talk about the group.

- 1 What will be the focus of your new group? Community building? Advocacy/Action? Education? Parenting? Family Formation?
- 2 What are three goals you have for the group?
- 3 Who will your members be? LGBTQ means lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer. Will you be open and inclusive of all these groups? Depending on your mission statement, you may also choose to welcome straight allies and parents-to-be as active members within your group. Think about who you want to include and why. This should tie back to the goals you have created for your group.
- 4 How will you be welcoming, mindful, and inclusive of marginalized LGBTQ groups including, but not limited to, families of color, trans families, single parents, poly families, isolated families in rural towns, and families of low socioeconomic status? If it appears that there are no bisexual or transgender parents in your community, remember these families are often invisible.
- 5 If you are creating an in-person group, how often would you like your group to meet and where? If your group is strictly virtual, how can people connect and interact?
- 6 Who will help you with the group? Be clear on personal commitment and abilities. Consider whether there will be a single group leader or a number of different officials. How will these positions be filled? Most parents are very busy, so be realistic about what you can and cannot do. Some coordinators or admins find it helpful to designate how many hours per month they can commit to the group while others have found that being clear on specific job descriptions is useful.
- 7 Choose the name of your group. Have fun and come up with something catchy that reflects the personality and mission of the group. Brainstorm with others.
- 8 Choose contact information for your group. This is important for new members and other resources to contact you. We strongly suggest using a post office box, email address and/or designated phone number. You can easily create an email address for group use without having to use your personal one. You want to be cautious about publishing home contact information.

STEP 3

Developing Your Mission Statement



Now you are ready to write your group's mission statement. A mission statement is a brief paragraph that gives a clear and concise message about why your group exists and sets a direction for the future of the group. Mission statements are useful as criteria for measuring the effectiveness of your group's activities against the ultimate goal(s) of your group. They can also double as a group description on social media or other public facing outlets.

Your mission statement should answer the following questions:

- ▶ Who does this group primarily serve? Consider listing out marginalized LGBTQ groups to show your commitment to inclusivity
- ▶ What are the basic needs that this group fills?
- ▶ How does this group meet the needs of those it serves?
- ▶ What makes this group unique?
- ▶ What values does this group seek to promote?

Tips

- 1 Keep your statement concise and simple. Three sentences is a good goal to strive for.
- 2 Remember that the statement is flexible; if the group decides to change direction, the mission statement can always be updated.
- 3 Effective mission statements take time to perfect – give your group a few weeks for input and final editing.
- 4 A good mission statement should explain why your group exists, and what it hopes to achieve in the future.
- 5 Make sure that everyone in the group gets a copy of the statement. Use it often and openly; the mission statement should lead the group's planning efforts, goals, and projects.

Sample mission statement:

The Parents' Club of Providence enriches the lives of LGBTQ-headed families, both within our club and our community. We are a multicultural, multiracial group of parents, grandparents, and guardians who have come together to form a volunteer-led, non-profit organization that provides education, support, social activities and structures to promote family equality by creating safe spaces and networking opportunities in which all people are welcome.

STEP 4

Choosing Your Platform



Social Media

Social media has created a wonderful opportunity for people to connect. Regardless of the platform that you decide to use, privacy and safety are major concerns for most members. Remember, you will most likely have a mix of members who are out and closeted in your group. Take some time to research the privacy policies of the social media platform you are considering. Be clear with your members about the group's degree of privacy. Some people like Meetup.com because it is not connected to their Facebook account and therefore does not risk family, friends or co-workers seeing the groups they are members of. Others enjoy participating in Facebook Groups, as they appreciate the convenience.

Some groups have multiple social media platforms where they are able to promote their group, host activities, and provide space for members to connect. Depending on your group, you may want more than one platform. It might be beneficial to host one public page to describe the group to the public and a separate secret or private group only viewable to members. As the group leader, you will have to make the decision for your group, based on the needs of your members.

Below are some social media platforms that groups may use:



Facebook



Twitter



Meetup.com



Snapchat



Instagram



Group created website

Currently, Facebook Groups has 3 privacy settings you can pick from:

- ▶ Public
- ▶ Closed
- ▶ Secret

Please note, Facebook updates their setting often. We strongly encourage you to double check with their Help Center for the most accurate and updated information. Do your research, and be sure to openly inform your members of the group setting.

STEP 5

Resources Needed to Launch



Community Partners

Partnering and collaborating with others can be powerful to help further the cause.

- ▶ Are there other organizations or individuals serving LGBTQ families in your community?
- ▶ If there are, have you connecting with them?

Often, people are interested and eager to work together for marginalized communities. Think about ways you can plan an event or activity together. They likely have resources you can share with your members. Plus, they can help promote your group and future activities.

Start-up Expenses

What financial resources are needed? Keep in mind, there could be expenses involved in starting and maintaining a family group such as:

- ▶ Running ads in local papers or magazines
- ▶ Advertising on social media
- ▶ Designing and printing flyers, shirts, and/or banner
- ▶ Securing space for meetings
- ▶ Marching in Pride parades

Outreach List

Determine your outreach list. Gather contact information (names, emails and websites) for other groups, leaders, and business owners in your community. This will serve as your initial “outreach tool” to advertise and solicit members and volunteers.

Suggested outreach list:

- ▶ LGBTQ parents
- ▶ Local LGBTQ groups
- ▶ LGBTQ-friendly churches/synagogues
- ▶ Schools
- ▶ Bookstores
- ▶ Local LGBTQ papers
- ▶ Local LGBTQ-friendly businesses
- ▶ Existing LGBTQ parent social media groups

Develop a list of expenses associated with launching your group. Look at your list and think of creative ways to get these items or activities donated at no cost.

- ▶ What resources are available to you now?
- ▶ Who do you know, or who do your friends and family members know?

Check out our Toolkit for Engaging Community Partners in Activity Planning for more details!

STEP 6

Planning your First Activity

If you are starting a local group, choose a date for the initial group meeting. It is important to keep work and school schedules, childcare needs, and public transit schedules in mind when selecting a date and time. For in-person family groups, social gatherings are probably the most popular and easiest type of event to plan. They provide LGBTQ families an opportunity to meet and build relationships with other families, for children to see other families like theirs, and to simply have fun.

If you are starting a virtual group, pick your first discussion topic or interactive activity. For virtual groups, community building is equality as important. Strong online relationships and connections with other LGBTQ families can be a powerful tool for support, encouragement, and resource finding.

For more information on planning events, check out our Toolkit, *A Step-by-Step Guide to Activity Planning*.



STEP 7

Joining our Network

Congratulations! You are now ready to start your family group. The National Network of LGBTQ Family Groups can help you troubleshoot as you get up and running and will work with you to support your growth. As soon as your group is set up, submit your National Network Membership Application!

Once a member, you will have access to:

- ▶ Trainings
- ▶ Mentorship opportunities
- ▶ Mini-grants
- ▶ Member-only resources
- ▶ Directory listing on our website to make it easier for local families to find you.

JOIN US TODAY!