



## Tips for Strengthening and Improving LGBTQ+ Sexual Assault Survivors' Access to Services in Oregon

***Note:** LGBTQ stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer. It is also frequently used for a wide array of gender and sexual minority identities. This tip sheet uses LGBTQ+ to indicate the acronym's use as an expansive umbrella term. There is no singular LGBTQ+ identity, and the term inherently refers to people who may have identities and experiences that are very different from each other.*

### Background

LGBTQ+ individuals experience sexual assault at rates equal to or higher than the rest of the population.<sup>1</sup> However, sexual assault services are often perceived as being exclusively for cisgender<sup>2</sup> heterosexual women. We spent nine months meeting with LGBTQ+ survivors, their supporters, LGBTQ+ community stakeholders, and Oregon victim service providers (VSPs), and asked for their guidance on how to improve access to services for LGBTQ+ sexual assault survivors. This tip sheet is the result of those conversations.

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., *The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS): 2010 Findings on Victimization by Sexual Orientation*, Tables 1 & 2; and *The Report of the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey*, Figure 15.15.

<sup>2</sup> "Cisgender" describes a person whose internal sense of gender is consistent with the sex they were assigned at birth.

This tip sheet intended to help VSPs, particularly confidential advocates in Oregon,<sup>3</sup> make their services more accessible and responsive to LGBTQ+ sexual assault survivors. We intend it to serve as an issue-spotting tool; it is not a best practices guide. We encourage VSPs to view this as one resource, among many, that can support their efforts to provide truly inclusive services that respond to and meet LGBTQ+ survivors' needs.

The tips in this document are organized by program area, from program-wide considerations like policies and training to tips on talking with survivors one-on-one. The pages are color coded by topic for ease of reference.

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<sup>3</sup> Many of these tips assume that the reader and their program are able to keep confidential a client's information, including their LGBTQ+ identity. Before collecting sensitive information, please ensure you inform the client if you cannot keep their information private. Know that organizations who receive funding through the Oregon Department of Justice's Crime Victim and Survivor Services Division of the (CVSSD), Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), and Victims of Crime Act (VOCA), among others, have additional confidentiality requirements.

## Guiding Principles

In addition to the specific tips below, there are some guiding principles that can help guide your work to make your services more responsive.

**Work to serve marginalized communities should be led by people in those communities.** Developing trusting relationships with community-based organizations is foundational to assessing your program's work with LGBTQ+ and other marginalized survivors and should be undertaken prior to or as part of an organization's self-assessment. Partnering with state and local LGBTQ+ organizations is essential to understanding the dynamics affecting LGBTQ+ people in your service population. We also encourage programs to partner with or consult national LGBTQ+ anti-violence projects in order to follow best practices for serving LGBTQ+ sexual assault survivors. The resource section of this document lists several such organizations as a starting point.

**Like all victims, LGBTQ+ survivors live at the intersections.** Their lived experiences as survivors are profoundly impacted by race, class, gender, disability, economic status, education, and more. Efforts to make your services more responsive to communities of color, people experiencing homelessness, and individuals with disabilities can and should go hand in hand with your efforts to reach more LGBTQ+ survivors. Partnering with organizations focused on disability rights and race equity is an essential step to evaluating your program's accessibility to LGBTQ+ survivors.

**Representation matters.** Having staff (including those in leadership positions), volunteers, and board members who are members of the marginalized communities you intend to serve can help you in that effort. A diverse staff improves your ability to identify gaps in your services and opportunities to grow that you might otherwise miss. It also sends a message to members of LGBTQ+ and other marginalized communities that they will be welcomed and adequately served when they seek assistance from your organization.

## Organizational Structure and Culture

All organizations must routinely assess whether the work they are doing is aligned with their core values, and whether they are succeeding at meeting their goals. Partnering with community and subject-matter experts makes this assessment work more robust. It also makes it more likely that you will be able to identify opportunities to improve your services. Self-assessment without community engagement is likely to have a more limited impact than an assessment paired with and guided by community partnership.

**Assess whether your organization is ready to serve LGBTQ+ survivors.** Use a self-assessment tool to identify whether your organization has the necessary foundation to serve LGBTQ+ survivors, and ways your organization can be more welcoming and culturally responsive.<sup>4</sup>

**Set and enforce the expectation that inclusivity is a core and required value for volunteers, staff, and board members.** Explicitly naming this as a value in your handbook or other organizational documents is a key aspect of holding your organization to this goal.

**Ensure you are meeting your legal obligations under federal, state, and local nondiscrimination laws.** For example, Oregon law prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity in a variety of services and public accommodations.<sup>5</sup> Local jurisdictions may have additional protections for LGBTQ+ people.

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<sup>4</sup> See for example FORGE Forward's *Is Your Agency Ready to Serve Transgender and Non-Binary Clients?* See the resource guide for more information on FORGE.

<sup>5</sup> Oregon's Bureau of Labor and Industries has Technical Assistance for Employers on Gender and Gender Identity in the workplace, available at <https://www.oregon.gov/boli/TA/Pages/FactSheetsFAQs/Gender.aspx> (last accessed August 21, 2019).

## Policies and Trainings

Here are some specific examples of policies and training that can help make your organization more LGBTQ-responsive. Partnering with community-specific programs and seeking legal advice are both essential steps to ensure that you have robust, LGBTQ-responsive, and legally sound policies in place.

**Develop, implement, and enforce anti-harassment and anti-discrimination policies for employees, volunteers, and participants.** Include specific details and examples of the type of behavior prohibited, who is protected (e.g., participants, staff, and/or volunteers), and what steps a person can take to make a complaint, including the person(s) tasked with receiving and responding to a report.

**Develop and implement a policy allowing people to use the restroom most consistent with their gender identity.** Ensure all staff and participants are informed of your bathroom policy through training and signage.

**Train staff on terminology and issues common in the LGBTQ+ community.** Include in the training using a person's name and pronouns as requested, prioritizing gender neutral language, and avoiding heteronormative assumptions (such as presuming all female survivors have male partners).

**It is important not to rely on LGBTQ+ staff and volunteers to educate their colleagues in addition to their regular duties.**

**Develop, implement, and enforce policies on disability access, and provide training for all staff.** Ensuring that staff understand and comply with disability policies is essential to ensuring access to all survivors.

**LGBTQ+ survivors are more likely to have a disability than their cisgender and/or heterosexual counterparts.<sup>6</sup>**

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<sup>6</sup> Disability Among Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Adults: Disparities in Prevalence and Risk, Karen Fredriksen-Goldsen-Hyun-Jun Kim-Susan Barkan, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3490559/> (accessed July 22, 2019).

## Physical Space

The physical setting(s) in which you meet with survivors can have a significant impact on the quality and depth of your engagement. Overall, partnering with disability rights organizations to thoroughly assess your program’s accessibility is essential—the following accessibility tips are specific examples. Working with your partners at LGBTQ-specific organizations will help you better gauge whether your efforts are responsive to the needs of LGBTQ survivors.

**Display inclusive agency-appropriate materials to convey an “all are welcome here” message in any spaces where survivors may be present.** Examples include displaying a rainbow flag, providing LGBTQ-specific magazines or resource information, and hanging artwork depicting diverse LGBTQ+ community in offices and common spaces.



*The Progress Flag updates the traditional Pride Flag by incorporating white, pink, and blue to expressly represent trans folks and brown and black for LGBTQ people of color (left). Sign indicating gender-neutral and wheelchair accessible restroom (middle). Restroom sign stating: This restroom may be used by any person regardless of gender or gender expression (right).*

**Provide signage in your entry way or interview rooms that invites survivors to share the name and pronouns they wish you to use.** For example, “We respect everyone’s identities. Please feel free at any time to tell us the name and pronouns we should use for you.”

**Where possible, offer single room options in shelters and gender-neutral, single occupant restrooms.** Some LGBTQ+ survivors will feel safest with this higher level of privacy. Even one single-room restroom will make your facility more accessible to survivors with a range of privacy and accessibility needs. Do not require LGBTQ+ survivors to use different facilities than other survivors.

## Outreach and Messaging

LGBTQ+ people frequently rely on word-of-mouth recommendations to find LGBTQ+ responsive services. Partnering with LGBTQ+ community organizations is therefore key both to making your services more responsive to LGBTQ+ survivors, and to getting the word out in the community that your services are safe and inclusive. Here are some additional specific tips for reaching LGBTQ+ survivors.

**When describing your services, explicitly identify LGBTQ+ people as potential recipients.** Make clear that your program recognizes and affirms LGBTQ+ identities. For example, include language such as “Women’s support group (open to all women, including transgender, lesbian, gay, and bisexual women, and nonbinary survivors who are most comfortable in a women’s group).”

**Ensure that your brochures, websites, and other outreach materials depict survivors from a range of communities.** Include photos and other images of LGBTQ+ survivors who are people of color, LGBTQ+ individuals with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ survivors from other under-served communities to ensure all survivors see themselves reflected in your target community.

**Include statistics on LGBTQ survivors in presentations, promotional materials, and other external communications.** This can both increase awareness of LGBTQ+ survivors’ needs and communicate your program’s desire to be inclusive.<sup>7</sup>

**Don’t generalize from one experience and assume it applies to all community members.**

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<sup>7</sup> For example, while overall 1 in 5 women will experience rape in her lifetime for bisexual women that figure is closer to 1 in 3, and for transgender people it is 1 in 2. The Report of the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey. Washington, DC: National Center for Transgender Equality.

**Offer LGBTQ+-specific services if possible and appropriate.** For example, consider LGBTQ+ survivor support groups or all-gender support groups.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Forge (2017). Part of the Solution: Gender-Integrated Sexual Assault Support Groups (Webinar), <https://forge-forward.org/event/raliance-gender-integrated-sa-support-groups-webinar/> (Accessed August 21, 2019).

## Intake, Data Collection, and Feedback

Many programs have specific information they must collect, and limited options for how to record and report their data. Regardless of your formal data-collection requirements, prioritize the survivor's comfort by making sure they know that questions about identity are optional, and if applicable, that the limited set of "official" options in your database is out of your control and not responsive to the LGBTQ+ community.

**Use a survivor's correct name and pronouns.** Invite survivors to tell you the name and pronouns they use regardless of what is on their identity documents. Ask whether the name and pronouns a survivor uses change based on context. For example, a survivor may use their chosen name with their family and their legal name with their employer.



*An image of a classic nametag sticker that reads "Hello, my pronouns are: They/Them" (above). Consider wearing a sticker or button like this to announce your pronouns. It's an easy way of signaling to trans and nonbinary survivors that it's safe to share theirs.*

**If you collect sexual orientation, gender identity and expression (SOGIE) data, ask these questions of everyone you serve.**<sup>9</sup> Explain why the information is useful to the survivor and to you and your organization, and how personal information will be protected and/or shared. Make these questions optional to

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<sup>9</sup> See the Human Rights Campaign's *SOGIE Data Collection Guide* designed to help agencies assess their readiness for SOGIE data collection and offers in-depth guidance on how to collect SOGIE information with youth and adults. [www.hrc.org/resources/all-children-all-families-agency-data-collection](http://www.hrc.org/resources/all-children-all-families-agency-data-collection)

answer and inform survivors prior to asking that they may decline. Consider using a script to provide consistent information. Don't assume someone's identity based on appearance or the gender of their partner or assailant.

**If possible, ask open-ended questions and allow the survivor to use their own words for their identities.** Explain to the survivor what response options are available and let them select the one that best fits at this time. For example, “the options I have are Straight, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Other. “Other’ lets me enter a different description for your identity. Do any of those options feel comfortable for you?”

**Create and distribute client feedback forms that include questions related to inclusivity, respect, and anti-oppression.** For example, include a question asking survivors if they felt welcomed, respected, and empowered by staff.

**Use SOGIE data and survivor feedback forms to help you assess if and how well you're serving the communities you know are at risk.** Consider sharing this (non-personally identifying) information with LGBTQ+ community partners so they can help you identify or evaluate your outreach and engagement strategies.

## Communication

This section provides specific tips on communicating with and about LGBTQ+ survivors. At the core, these tips are about providing survivor-centered and trauma-informed services and recognizing LGBTQ people's expertise on their own experiences and needs.

**Seek consent and instruction on whether, when, and how you can share information internally and externally about a survivor's sexual orientation and/or gender identity.** Ask both about affirmatively sharing (for example, in order to help a referral resource better serve the survivor) and about correcting others (for example, if you hear somebody using the wrong pronouns, or incorrectly assuming the survivor is heterosexual).

**Misgendering happens when you use the wrong gendered pronouns or language for a person.  
Misgendering can be very painful.**

**Become comfortable with introducing yourself with your pronouns.** For example, you might say, "Hi. My name is Mary, and I use she/her pronouns." Avoid inviting "preferred" pronouns as this can imply that the use of the pronoun is merely a preference and not the respectful and necessary way to address people.

**Encourage staff to include pronouns on business cards and in email signatures.** This practice signals your organization's awareness of trans and nonbinary issues to service recipients, partners, and others. It can also help trans and nonbinary individuals to initiate a conversation about pronouns because they know this is something you have considered.

**Practice talking about people without using pronouns—you don't have to know a person's pronouns to avoid misgendering them!**

**Allow survivors to use their own words to describe their identities and relationships.** Allow survivors to use the language they're comfortable with to describe their experiences, partners, and bodies. Ask whether they want you to

use that same language. For example, “I hear you saying you’re queer. Is that how I should to describe you to others, or is there different language I should use?”

**Acknowledge the limits of services, knowledge, or resources and offer options.**

For example, “We have no private rooms in shelter but can offer A & B. Would either of those work for you?” or “I want to be transparent; I’m new to using they/them pronouns. I’ll do my best and welcome your feedback if I mess up.”

**In the rare situation where a survivor is required to use their legal name, discuss the situation and their options.**

For example, while a survivor is required to use their legal name on official court documents, they may request that during court proceedings the judge and parties address and describe them with the name and pronouns they commonly use. You might also ask the survivor if they would like help changing their legal name or gender marker.

**Note: In Oregon, the process for obtaining a court-ordered name and gender marker change is simple and takes about two weeks. Fee waivers are available with evidence of a person’s inability to pay. A person may also update their birth certificate fairly easily.**

**The Victim Rights Law Center can help transgender and nonbinary survivors in Oregon with this process.**

## Additional Resources

**Basic Rights Oregon** is Oregon's LGBTQ rights and policy advocacy organization. BRO works to ensure that all lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) Oregonians experience **legal** and **lived** equality by building a broad and inclusive politically powerful movement, shifting public opinion and achieving policy victories. Link: [www.basicrights.org](http://www.basicrights.org)

**Demonstrate Access** is a resource website with ideas and tools for community-based service organizations. It is designed to help providers and organizations identify barriers and make changes in policy and practice to increase access for LGBTQ communities. Link: [www.demonstrateaccess.org](http://www.demonstrateaccess.org)

**Disability Rights Oregon** upholds the civil rights of people with disabilities to live, work, and engage in the community. The nonprofit works to transform systems, policies, and practices to give more people the opportunity to reach their full potential. Link: [www.droregon.org](http://www.droregon.org)

**FORGE** is a national transgender anti-violence organization which provides direct services to transgender, gender non-conforming, and gender non-binary survivors of sexual assault. FORGE also provides training and technical assistance to providers around the country who work with transgender survivors of sexual assault, domestic and dating violence, and stalking. Link: [www.forge-forward.org](http://www.forge-forward.org)

The **National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs** is coalition of local member programs and affiliate organizations that work to create systemic and social change through data analysis, policy advocacy, education and technical assistance. NCAVP is run by the Anti-Violence Project, a direct service and outreach program that empowers lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and HIV-affected communities and allies to end all forms of violence through organizing and education and supports survivors through counseling and advocacy. Link: [www.avp.org/ncavp/](http://www.avp.org/ncavp/)

**The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVIS)** is a Centers for Disease Control survey that collects information about intimate partner violence, sexual violence, and stalking victimization in the United States. The 2010 Findings on Victimization by Sexual Orientation provide statistics on LGB Americans' experiences with sexual and other violence. Unfortunately, this survey

does not provide information about gender identity. Link:

<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/datasources/nisvs/index.html>

**The Network/La Red** is a survivor-led, social justice organization that works to end partner abuse in lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, SM, polyamorous, and queer communities. Rooted in anti-oppression principles, their work aims to create a world where all people are free from oppression. Link: [www.tnlr.org](http://www.tnlr.org)

**The Northwest Network of Bi, Trans, Lesbian and Gay Survivors** is a Seattle-based anti-domestic violence organization that works to end violence and abuse by building loving and equitable relationships in LGBTQ communities locally and nationally. NW Network provides technical assistance and training for victim service providers, as well as direct services. Link: [www.nwnetwork.org](http://www.nwnetwork.org)

**Trans Lifeline** is a transgender-led community-based suicide prevention program operating in the United States and Canada. Their lifeline provides support to transgender and nonbinary callers experiencing anything from isolation to suicidal ideation. They also run a microgrants program which offers funds to assist transgender and nonbinary people in paying fees to change name and gender on government-issued identity documents. Link: [www.translifeline.org](http://www.translifeline.org)

**The 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey (USTS)** is the largest survey ever devoted to the lives and experiences of trans people. The USTS website includes the complete report, executive summaries, reports on the experiences of trans people of color, and state-specific reports. Link: [www.ustranssurvey.org](http://www.ustranssurvey.org)

**The Victim Rights Law Center** provides free holistic legal services to survivors of sexual assault in Massachusetts and Oregon. The VRLC can provide technical assistance (support, individual and programmatic consultation, resources, and training) on serving LGBTQ+ sexual assault survivors, and on privacy and serving survivors of gender-based violence more broadly. You can contact our Director of Training and Technical Assistance, Jessica Mindlin, at (503) 274-5477 x1, or [jmindlin@victimrights.org](mailto:jmindlin@victimrights.org). Link: [www.victimrights.org](http://www.victimrights.org)



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