

# A GUIDE TO HOSTING LGBTQ+ EVENTS SAFELY

for Local Councils in NSW





ACON is aware of escalating disinformation, lobbying, stigma and violence directed against LGBTQ+ people, especially trans people, drag artists and creatives, and those who are gender expansive.

We believe government bodies like local councils should be able to confidently support their LGBTQ+ residents and families, and offer safe, fun and engaging opportunities for LGBTQ+ people, our families and allies to gather.

When LGBTQ+ voices are uplifted and heard, and LGBTQ+ people can live freely as themselves in their local community, we are building safer, stronger and healthier environments for all.

Hosting LGBTQ+ events sends an important and visible message of inclusion and affirmation to your LGBTQ+ locals and the broader community.

We also know that these events improve local community participation and connection, reduce social isolation, improve mental health, and enhance wellbeing among LGBTQ+ communities.

We have developed this guide to offer tips and advice to help support local councils in your important work to affirm and celebrate LGBTQ+ communities in your local area.

The escalating anti-LGBTQ+ and anti-gender agenda is important to know about as it means the LGBTQ+ people you work with and for may require extra protection or safety measures during such gatherings.

This is why, despite pressure from hate groups and anti-LGBTQ+ lobbyists, cancellation of these important events should only ever be a last resort.

This guide offers a number of steps that you can take to make your event as safe and inclusive as possible.

Remember, not all LGBTQ+ events will be targeted with negative attention, and 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

When you are planning an event or LGBTQ+ specific activity, start by working with LGBTQ+ organisations near you like ACON, Twenty10 and The Gender Centre.

ACON can provide a range of materials you can distribute at your event that speak to the range of support services and programs we offer LGBTQ+ people and our allies.

We specialise in LGBTQ+ health areas, including sexual health, suicide prevention, mental health, trans health, First Nations health, alcohol and drugs harm reduction, cancer prevention, 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.

Alongside this guide, ACON can also provide advice about how to plan events that meet the needs of your LGBTQ+ locals. Where possible, we also suggest safe venues and possible partners.

While you may have LGBTQ+ employees, it is always important to still connect and consult early with LGBTQ+ groups and local LGBTQ+ community leaders to ensure that they are aware of your event and can share any concerns or experiences of running similar events with you.

Partnering with other government bodies like your Local Health District or Primary Health Network can also be useful to deter potential hate groups, while also ensuring LGBTQ+ locals know about inclusive and affirming local services.

We strongly encourage you to talk to other councils and organisations that have run similar events so that you can learn from their experiences and apply these to your events.

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.

Local community events help foster and celebrate a sense of community that is friendly, welcoming and embraces diversity. These events can greatly enhance the sense of belonging for LGBTQ+ people, many of whom may not feel welcome where they live.

Being clear about why the event is happening, why it's important and how it aligns to the strategic focus of your council will support your planning.

## 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 safety action plan for how you will manage potential disruption will help you to remain proactive and mitigate risks to the safety of your employees and 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 the 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 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 council meetings and events.

## WORKING WITH THE NEW SOUTH WALES POLICE FORCE (NSWPF) AND SECURITY TO MANAGE DISRUPTION

LGBTQ+ community members do 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 local GLLO/LGBTIQ+ Liaison Officer via the Crime Prevention Unit (CPU), a specialised team that is part of every command/District in NSW.

The NSWPF recommend that this contact comes 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.

The NSWPF Engagement & Hate Crime Unit are also available to provide education to your council about what actions constitute hate crimes-incidents and the NSW legislation relevant to hate speech and hate symbols.

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 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 is 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+ groups.

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 community, 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 council employees, consider creating a generic email address (eg [councilevents@council](mailto:councilevents@council)) for all communications regarding the event; so that individual employees 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+ staff are protected from any abusive messages.

Some organisers also choose to create Facebook events or Facebook pages specifically for the event. This can help to bypass pressure on individuals 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 in order 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 include:

- 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 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 seeing even more discriminatory content due to the 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. This sends a strong message to your communities of support, without engaging in 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 LGBTQ+ communities without 'giving oxygen' to these hateful views.

If your council 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 support 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 LGBTQ+ communities, clearly naming those opposing LGBTQ+ rights as hate groups.
- It's important to highlight that these groups are a very small minority of the Australian population wanting 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 the rights of LGBTQ+ people.
- 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 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 LGBTQ+ communities have a long history of peaceful, non-violent protest, and so your local LGBTQ+ community members may organise a counter-protest.

If you believe this may occur, work together with your LGBTQ+ community partners, and encourage LGBTQ+ 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 LGBTQ+ 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.



## KEY CONTACTS

### ACON:

To notify ACON of an event you are planning and/or request resources, please email [acon@acon.org.au](mailto: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):

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

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](mailto:EHCU@police.nsw.gov.au)

### 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 that support LGBTQ+ multicultural communities.

### ACON's Local Regional Community Info Guides:

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

### Greater Western Sydney LGBTQ+ Inclusion Networks:

These 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 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 a list of businesses or services that actively welcomes and includes LGBTQ+ people please refer to the [Welcome Here Directory](#)

### Pride Inclusion Programs:

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

Refer to [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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