LGBTQIA+ Equity Actions Checklist

The Cloudburst Group has developed this checklist for housing organizations working with LGBTQIA+ homeless persons to help foster a low-barrier environment that welcomes this population. Many agencies and communities can reduce barriers to entry and improve overall program operations by revisiting organizational policies, practices, and protocols through the lens and experience of LGBTQIA+ populations seeking services.

The Cloudburst Group is a longtime technical assistance provider to the Department of Housing and Urban Development and many communities implementing homeless and housing programs. This checklist can serve as a guide to assess organizational practices and identify opportunities where equity can be further embedded within organizational practices to foster a more inclusive and welcoming environment for the LGBTQIA+ community.

Laws and Regulations

Educate staff on federal, state, and local non-discrimination laws, including the Fair Housing Act and the Equal Access Rule and using the toolkit provided that can help housing staff explore scenarios that can foster a welcoming environment for LGBTQIA+ persons.

Educate yourself on the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) and intimate partner violence. Multiple resources on VAWA are available on the HUD exchange and through HUD's National Fair Housing Training Academy.

Training

Establish an annual training regimen to ensure housing programs know how to implement trauma-informed care for the LGBTQIA+ community and families.

Space and Environment

Create spaces, including bathrooms, available for anyone of any gender or gender identity.

Create an agency-wide pronoun policy:

> Ensure a policy that asks people their preferred pronouns, if they have them, and does not assume pronouns based upon appearance, name, or other traits.

> Apply this policy to everyone—staff, volunteers, clients, etc.

> For meetings, ask those with name tags or video ID's to add their pronouns to their name tags; for in person meetings offer name tags and add on stickers for pronouns

Create an inclusive environment for all populations

> Include flags, stickers, or other identifiers (especially safe space markers) throughout the facility, including on the front door.

Develop real connections and relationships with gender-non-conforming/trans-specific resources in your area in order to make more effective referrals for care and support.

Program Design

Remove barriers within your organizations and programs to make your program more inclusive.

Remove unnecessary criminal background checks and/or practices that screen people out because of specific offenses unless regulatorily required.

Remove unnecessary identification requirements.

Remove income requirements to receive services unless explicitly required by regulations.

Remove/reduce requirements forcing people to receive medical treatment of any type—including for human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), mental health, or substance abuse—to receive services, unless required by regulations.

Remove any unnecessary requirements that people must enroll or engage in case management to receive housing unless required by regulations. (But, do encourage case management.)

Update intake forms and applications:

Allow LGBTQIA+ clients to use their name of choice.

Allow clients to self-identify their own gender or to provide no gender.

Allow clients to self-identify their own pronoun or to provide no pronoun.

Do not ask personal questions that do not affect client eligibility or safety and are based only on curiosity (such as "have you transitioned?").

Continue to ask, but do not require people to answer, questions that are not required to assess program eligibility or for enrollment (e.g., sexual orientation, mental health, substance abuse, medical history).

Ask questions that may feel uncomfortable but are important, especially to a person's overall safety (e.g., whether they feel safe at home, or in the community and how you can make them feel safer).

Do not assume that all LGBTQIA+ people and families are the same!

Do the work within your community with these populations by meeting those who identify as such and listening to / learning about the issues and barriers they face.

Involve people with lived experience in your agency, program design, and set-up:

Hire staff, contractors, and consultants that reflect the LGBTQIA+ population when possible.

Allow clients from different backgrounds, races, ethnicities, genders, sexual orientations, etc., to review policies, forms, applications, etc.—and then be willing to make changes they recommend.

Be flexible, knowing that you or your program may need to change.

Housing

Be able to offer or refer individuals to different types of housing (as different types of people may need different types of housing to feel and be safe).

When possible, increase your maximum rent so that people can live in safer neighborhoods and units with access to LGBTQIA+ resources and supports.

When sharing in the portion of rent is required, do rental calculations correctly. For example, in many programs, allowable medical expenses for an entire family may reduce a household's portion of the rent, especially LGBTQIA+ medical expenses that may not be covered by any insurance.

Formalize processes that may lead to termination of any assistance to make sure that any process doesn't violate any federal or state laws

Do not terminate participants from your program unless they violate federal regulations for your specific program, any cross-cutting regulations, or serious program rules that put themselves, staff, or others at risk.

Should your housing organization wish to dialogue further about enhancing safe and welcoming spaces for LGBTQIA+ populations or to learn more about the housing and homeless programs, please contact info@cloudburstgroup.com.