

# Reaching Out for LGBTQ History



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If you critically evaluate your organization's collections and programming you will find "blind spots." Every cultural institution is "blind" to the narratives of some people and the communities they comprise. Those under-represented communities may have lived in the area you serve for generations or just arrived a few years ago, but regardless, they are your neighbors and their stories matter. If you are willing to listen and connect with those underserved parts of your community, you are on the right track to serving your mission in a more complete way.

All good outreach starts with a willingness to learn and understand, even with partners that you may have worked with in the past. When connecting with the LGBTQ community, you must have cultural empathy. This is true for any community with which you wish to connect, but are not a member. The good news is that there are LGBTQ organizations that would be happy to train your staff, volunteers and leadership. You will never be able to know everything about a certain underserved community, but making the effort to learn shows that you



(above) The Ohio History Connection's GOHI booth at Yellow Springs Pride Celebration, 2017.

(right) An example of a "pop-up" exhibit at the Ohio History Connection, for Pride Month, 2017.



are committed to building connections with respect and humility. It shouldn't be shocking, but understanding how to treat individuals with dignity and respect is essential before working alongside the LGBTQ community to collect and share LGBTQ history. Would you trust someone who didn't approach you respectfully? It doesn't take much time, but do your part to learn from those who know. Good intentions aren't enough.

Once you have had a chance to learn just some of the nuance and diversity of the larger LGBTQ community, it is time to get connecting! If you want to understand a community, you have to become involved in that community. Check out some LGBTQ community events in the area, including your local pride celebration (trust me, you have one nearby!). Invite some folks to get coffee and listen to their perspective on their history and how they think it should be preserved and/or presented.

Outreach empowers our organizations to learn about others' perspectives, but that work is meaningless unless you are willing to take feedback to heart and make changes based on what you hear. There may be mistrust of your organization or intentions. The community may wonder, "why did they wait so long to want to hear our history? Why now?" Trust takes time. Be genuine, forthright, patient and present—trust will follow.

Once you establish some trust within the community, invite them into your space. See if there is something that signals your space as welcoming or unwelcoming. Have a discussion around what you could improve to make the space a welcoming place for others. The American Alliance of Museums LGBTQ guidelines are an incredible way to inform and measure your improvement. Another option is to take some of the ideas in the community



As a special initiative of the Ohio History Connection, GOHI (Gay Ohio History Initiative) works to collect, preserve and share Ohio's LGBTQ history. As a part of our continuing efforts to ensure Ohio's LGBTQ community has a voice in deciding how their story is collected and shared, GOHI is forming a state-wide advisory council. It will be made up of representatives from across the state with at least one being from each OLHA region. If folks are interested in serving and helping to shape the future of GOHI and Ohio LGBTQ history preservation please contact Ben Anthony at [banthony@ohiohistory.org](mailto:banthony@ohiohistory.org) or 614-297-2476.

and create a program or event. Maybe it's an author talk, pop-up museum or walking tour. Keep it interactive and be sure to keep making connections as you attract new patrons.

The ultimate goal of your outreach is to build partnerships based on continuous and sustainable trust with your local LGBTQ community. That trust creates a foundation to better serve your mission and entire community, all while growing your collection, relevance and network of supporters.