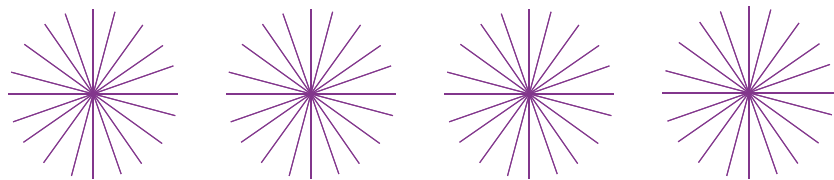


LGBTI COMMUNITY HUBS



Lessons Learned and Good Practices



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THE VOICES BEHIND ★ THIS GUIDE ★

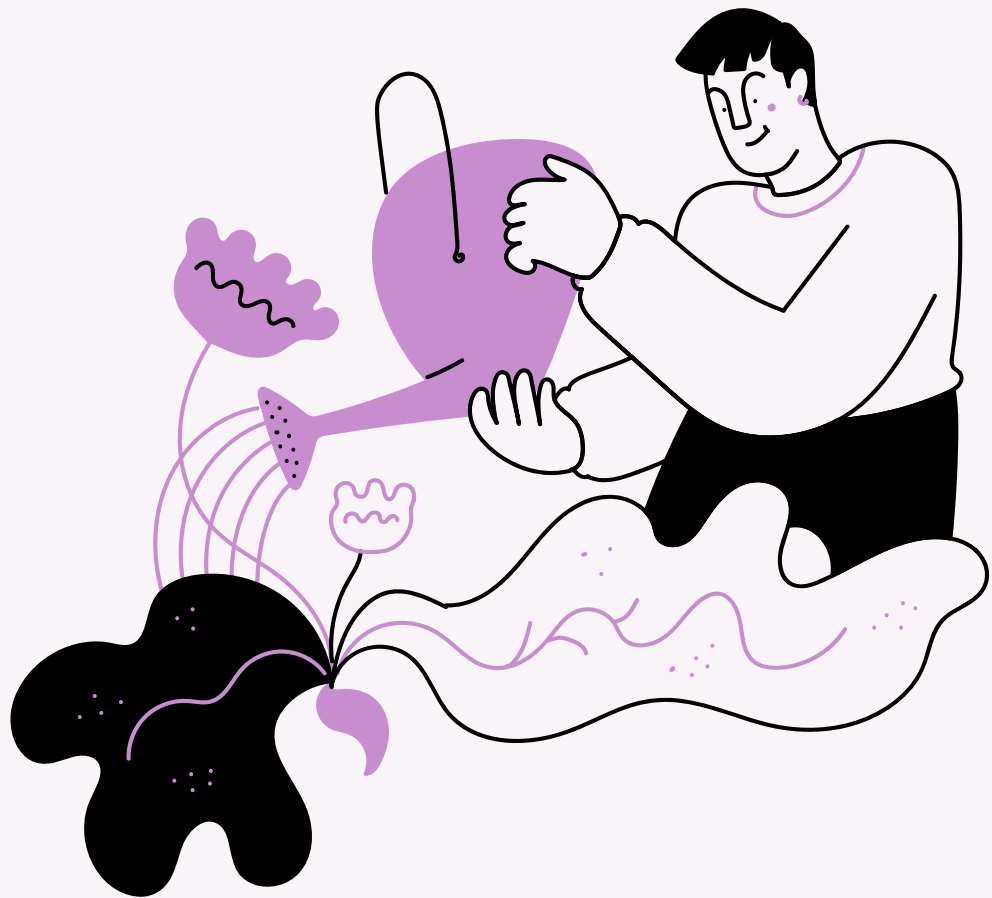
This leaflet compiles insights from LGBTI community hubs across Europe, offering a blend of experiences from different socio-cultural contexts in which community hubs operate. These lessons reflect shared challenges and solutions for creating inclusive, sustainable, and safe spaces for LGBTI+ individuals.

A special thank you to **Barcelona's LGBTI Centre, Casa Rosa (Belgium), Mozaik and QCentre (Romania), Piano I Association (Portugal), Pogled Community Centre (Bulgaria), and various activists from Poland** who contributed their time, knowledge, experiences and insights. Their dedication has helped shape this guide, offering practical strategies for sustaining and growing community spaces.



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INTRODUCTION



LGBTI community hubs provide vital spaces for belonging, support, and safety. Beyond social connection, these centers frequently offer essential services such as legal advice, career counseling, mental health support, and assistance with navigating complex bureaucracy - critical resources that many queer people struggle to access due to systemic discrimination, legal gaps, or institutional neglect. This brochure highlights key lessons and best practices from various LGBTI organizations and activists across Europe, offering guidance for those looking to establish or strengthen their own community spaces.

COMMON CHALLENGES IN LGBTI COMMUNITY SPACES

LGBTI hubs face various difficulties, regardless of location. Some of the most prevalent include:

- **Funding** – Many spaces rely on small one-time grants, donations, and exhausting fundraising efforts, making financial sustainability a challenge.
- **Continuous Community Engagement** – Raising awareness and ensuring individuals access available services requires ongoing outreach and trust-building. Intertwined with vulnerable context on the ground and lack of consistent funding, engagement becomes harder to upkeep.
- **Safety & Security** – Discrimination and violence in some areas necessitate strong safety measures for both visitors and staff.
- **Legal & Political Barriers** – In some countries, restrictive laws or political hostility hinder the visibility and operation of LGBTI spaces.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR STRONGER SPACES

Inspired by successful initiatives across Europe, here are essential practices that help cultivate vibrant and inclusive LGBTI community spaces:

a. Diverse Funding Sources

- **Public & Private Grants** – Seek funding from government programs and private foundations to secure long-term financial sustainability. Research available grants, align proposals with donor priorities, and build relationships with funding bodies to maximize support for your community space.
- **Fundraising Events** – Host community dinners, jam sessions/concerts, and other events to raise funds while increasing visibility and strengthening community support.
- **Crowdfunding** – Many LGBTI hubs use crowdfunding platforms to mobilize financial support. In Romania, for instance, individuals can redirect 3.5% of their income tax to a chosen NGO by filling in and submitting Form 230 online - a streamlined process that has helped organizations secure a significant portion of their budgets.
- **Social Enterprise** – Consider launching a non-profit social enterprise, which generates income while supporting your mission. Examples could include opening a café, retail store, or offering workshops and services to the public. This not only creates a self-sustaining revenue stream but also strengthens community involvement and awareness of your cause.

b. Fostering Community Engagement

- Outreach Programs – If possible, engage with local communities, universities, and schools to promote services and build trust.
- Vibrant Community Events – Organize film screenings, art exhibitions, and panel discussions to celebrate diversity, encourage dialogue, and strengthen community connections.
- Community Leadership – Supporting and empowering community members to take leadership roles through volunteering and internship opportunities strengthens engagement and promotes long-term sustainability of the space and the wider movement.

c. Ensuring Safety & Security


- Clear Security Measures – Well-lit spaces, security cameras, visible staff presence, clear signage, and emergency contact details all contribute to a secure and welcoming atmosphere. Regular safety audits, visitor registration system, panic buttons, and staff training in conflict de-escalation further enhance the space's overall security.
- Emergency Protocols – Develop clear emergency protocols to address threats, discrimination, or hate crimes. For practical guidance, refer to resources from [ILGA-Europe](#), [OSCE ODIHR](#), [Outright International](#), and other human rights organizations working on LGBTI safety and advocacy.
- Inclusive Practices – Ensure that LGBTI+ individuals from all walks of life and with all kinds of intersecting identities, feel welcome and safe. Putting in measures to combat discrimination and following them, as well as allowing different groups' voices to be heard are both good examples of good practices your space can and should strive to add to its operations.

SUSTAINABLE OPERATIONS FOR LONG-TERM SUCCESS

Build a Strong Team

Volunteers & Staff – Many hubs begin with volunteers who are essential in the early stages, bringing energy and passion to the mission. As organizations grow, hiring staff for key roles strengthens operations and ensures long-term sustainability. Paid staff bring professional expertise and consistency, which helps manage day-to-day tasks more effectively. Staff roles, like a manager to oversee operations or an outreach coordinator to engage with the community, allow the hub to focus on growth and impact. Other positions such as admin, communications managers, and specialized service providers (like counseling) can ensure that everything runs smoothly. By combining the dedication of volunteers with the expertise of staff, you create a strong foundation for success and a space that continues to serve the community effectively.

NB: An intriguing alternative to this structure are self-organized, informal horizontal collectives. There, decision-making is often more decentralized. In these collectives, volunteers and community members come together to contribute their time, skills, and resources. Decisions are made collectively to maintain a flat, collaborative structure. This model fosters inclusivity and collective ownership, ensuring that the community has a strong voice in both the funding and operations of the space. Significant examples are those of Kopriva Autonomous Space and Menta Space, both of which are based in Bulgaria.




Continuous Training - Ongoing training equips staff and volunteers with skills, knowledge, and sensitivity needed to support the LGBTI community effectively. Key topics include mental health support, conflict resolution, legal rights, outreach, and crisis intervention. Workshops on inclusive language, trauma-informed care, and cultural competence help create a safer, more welcoming space. Continuous learning strengthens service quality and ensures teams can adapt to evolving community needs.



Develop Strong Partnerships

Building Local Partnerships - Collaborating with local organizations—such as healthcare providers, legal aid services, mental health professionals, and social support groups, can significantly enhance the resources available to your community space. These partnerships can provide expert guidance, facilitate referrals, and help integrate LGBTI-friendly services into the broader support network.

Consider:

1. Establishing agreements with local clinics for free or low-cost HIV testing, PrEP access, and gender-affirming healthcare;
 2. Partnering with legal professionals who can offer pro-bono consultations on issues like discrimination, asylum applications, or workplace rights;
 3. Working with housing and social services to support LGBTI individuals facing homelessness or domestic violence.
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International Networks - Engaging with global LGBTI organizations opens doors to shared advocacy efforts, resource exchanges, and international funding opportunities. These networks provide access to:

1. Best practices from other queer community centers worldwide;
2. Training opportunities, mentorship programs, and leadership exchanges;
3. Advocacy collaborations for pressing issues such as LGBTI rights, legal protections, and policy changes;



Focus on Long-Term Planning



Strategic Goals – Setting yearly objectives ensures alignment with the community's changing needs and priorities. These goals should be:

1. **Community-driven:** Gather input through surveys or meetings to ensure objectives reflect the most urgent needs;
2. **Realistic and measurable:** Define specific targets - for example, launching a new support group, increasing attendance at events by 20%, or securing a new funding source;
3. **Flexible:** Be prepared to adapt as circumstances change, whether due to funding shifts, political landscapes, or community feedback.

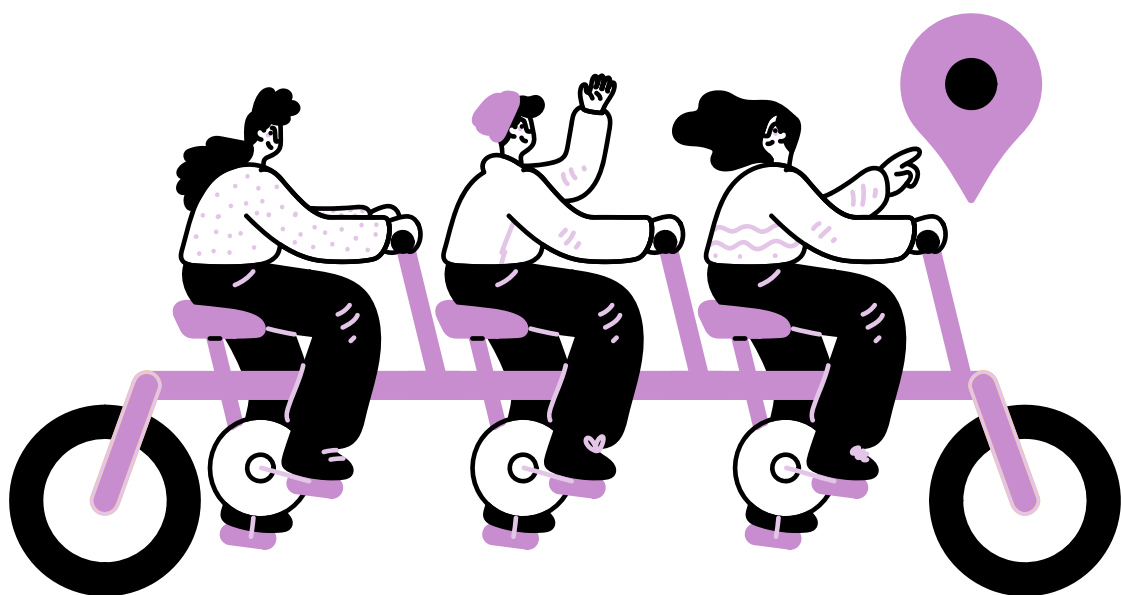
Monitoring & Evaluation – Regular assessments with the community members ensure that services remain relevant and effective. Key strategies include:

1. **Collecting anonymous feedback** through surveys or suggestion boxes;
2. **Hosting focus groups** with community members to discuss challenges and areas for improvement;
3. **Tracking attendance and engagement metrics** at events and programs to identify trends and areas for growth.

PRACTICAL EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICES

Several LGBTI hubs have adopted strategies to ensure their services remain impactful:

Comprehensive Services – Many LGBTI community spaces offer a holistic range of services designed to meet the diverse needs of their members. These can include legal aid to assist with issues such as discrimination or asylum applications, career counseling to help individuals navigate professional challenges and opportunities, and mental health support to provide resources for dealing with trauma, anxiety, and coming out. By addressing these areas, these hubs play a vital role in supporting the personal and professional growth of LGBTI individuals, helping them navigate societal barriers and live fulfilling lives.



Cultural & Social Programming – Regular cultural events, workshops, and social meetups are central to many LGBTI hubs. These activities provide opportunities for nurturing peer support groups and learning about queer history and activism, while also celebrating diversity through art, performances, and gatherings. They foster a sense of belonging, promote advocacy, and build solidarity within the LGBTI community and beyond, strengthening connections among individuals from diverse backgrounds.

Accessible & Safe Spaces – LGBTI spaces are increasingly focused on creating inclusive environments that cater to both physical and digital accessibility needs. Many spaces ensure that their physical locations are designed with wheelchair access, private counseling rooms for sensitive conversations, and welcoming social lounges where individuals can relax and connect. In addition, these hubs are expanding their digital presence by offering online support groups, virtual workshops, and digital resources to reach those who may be unable to attend in person. By fostering both physical and virtual safe spaces, these hubs ensure that people from all walks of life feel valued, secure, and supported, no matter their location or personal circumstances.



Providing Essential Hygiene & Well-Being Resources – Where possible, community centers can provide essential hygienic supplies to support visitors’ well-being. Offering wet wipes, menstrual products, condoms, dental dams, lube, disposable gloves, and basic toiletries (soap, deodorant, toothbrushes, and toothpaste), can make a meaningful difference. If resources allow, gender-affirming items like binders or shaving kits can also be made available. These materials should be offered discreetly and without stigma, ensuring that individuals can access what they need without having to ask directly.



FOSTERING A SAFE AND INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY SPACE

Managing a successful LGBTI community space requires ethical leadership and a strong internal framework. These key principles help maintain a safe, welcoming, and sustainable hub:

a. Community-Centered Decision-Making

- **“Nothing about us, without us”** – Decisions affecting individuals should always include their input.
- **Respect autonomy** – Encourage open conversations and allow people to share their own stories on their terms.

b. Building Trust Through Reliability

- **Follow through on commitments** – Do what you promise and communicate openly if plans change.
- **Avoid overpromising** – Be transparent about what your organization/collective can realistically provide.
- c. Setting & Maintaining Boundaries
- **Establish clear guidelines** – Community expectations should be well-communicated.
- **Ensure consistency** – Fair application of rules fosters trust and security.

d. Ethical & Consistent Leadership

- **Base decisions on valid reasoning** – Rules and policies should align with human and animal rights frameworks and community values.
- **Avoid arbitrary rules** – Clarity and transparency create trust.

e. A Unified Team

- **Present a consistent approach** – Even when disagreements exist internally, a cohesive external stance strengthens trust.
- **Regular team discussions** – Reevaluate policies and ensure alignment with community needs.

f. Openness to Community Feedback

- **Engage in active listening** – Community spaces exist for the people they serve; feedback should inform decisions.
- **Adapt based on needs** – Continuous learning and flexibility enhance the relevance of services.



For those seeking more in-depth guidance on fostering inclusive and accessible community spaces, [Building Inclusive Queer Spaces: A Community Toolkit](#) by Friends of the Joiners Arms is a valuable resource. This free publication offers practical advice and concrete steps to combat exclusion, created by and for queer people facing marginalization. It is designed to support queer venues, service providers, charities, and advocacy organizations in creating safer and more inclusive environments for all.

Final Remarks

LGBTI community hubs are vital for safety, advocacy, and social connection. By addressing challenges, embracing best practices, and fostering sustainable operations, these spaces can continue to empower and support individuals across Europe.

This leaflet serves as a practical guide for those looking to strengthen existing community hubs or establish new ones, ensuring that LGBTI individuals have access to the safe and inclusive spaces they need. Approach the material critically. Take those aspects of it that resonate with your realities locally.

For those just beginning, starting something new can feel daunting, and it is important to remember that progress takes time. Building a community space is a process of learning, adapting, and growing. Mix your vision and passion with patience and warmth, and give yourself space to evolve along the way. Every step forward, no matter how small, makes a difference. You are not alone. There are others out there raising and supporting similar spaces, and together we create a stronger, more inclusive future. Keep going, and do not forget to celebrate the milestones along the way.

About This Leaflet

This leaflet was created as part of the CERV-2022-EQUAL Project Rainbow Hub, supported by the European Commission. It aims to share key lessons learned and best practices for establishing and sustaining LGBTI community hubs, based on insights from various organizations and activists across Europe. The content is the result of collaboration between Bilitis Foundation and GLAS Foundation, operators of the Rainbow Hub community centre in Sofia, Bulgaria.

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