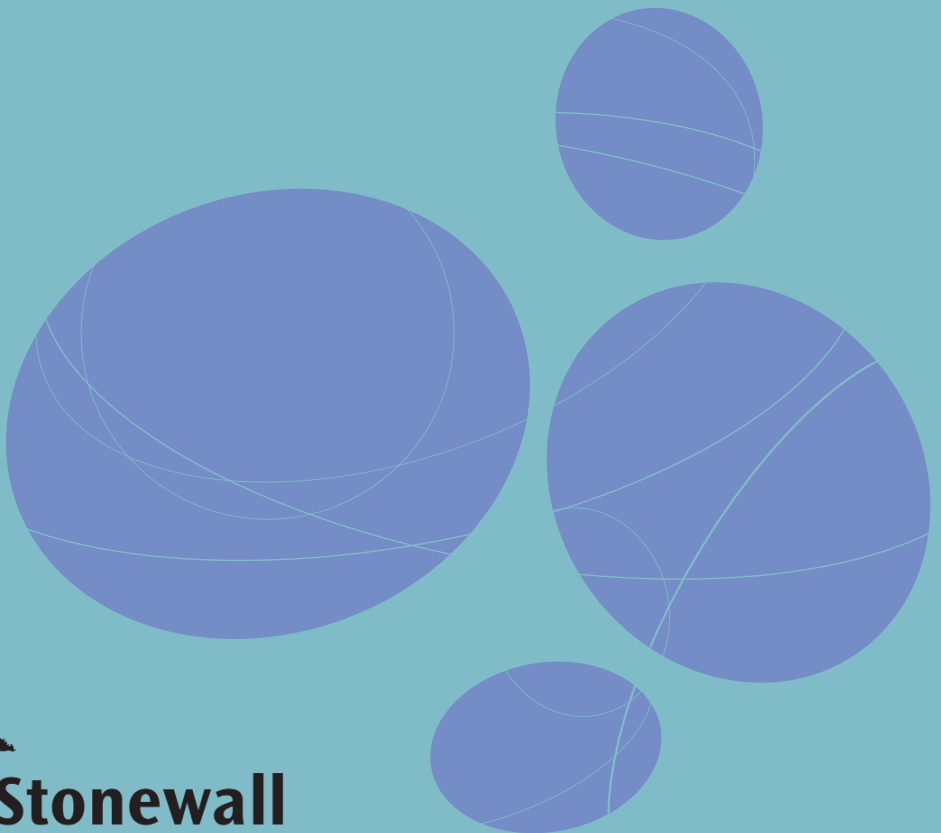


# NETWORK GROUPS

Setting up networks for lesbian,  
gay and bisexual employees



**Stonewall**  
WORKPLACE GUIDES

# NETWORK GROUPS

Setting up networks for lesbian,  
gay and bisexual employees



# FOREWORD

Employers across Britain increasingly recognise the importance of a commitment to diversity, which includes engaging with the needs of their lesbian and gay staff. At Stonewall we recognise that implementing effective policies and procedures to support gay staff can be challenging. That's why we have

produced this guide to help you set up a network group, both to serve the needs of your gay staff and to further the equality agenda of your organisation.

Establishing a lesbian and gay network group will make your gay staff a visible element of your workforce. It will provide a forum for unique networking opportunities and a means of peer support between gay staff. It will also enable you, as an employer, to engage directly with the needs of gay staff and to recognise which policies may impact on lesbian and gay employees, and what changes can be made to improve staff experiences.

Such a step isn't just important for your staff; it's good for business and service delivery too. Gay people are becoming increasingly aware of their economic power as consumers and increasingly want to work or engage only with organisations committed to equality.

Setting up a lesbian and gay network group is a key step to ensuring effective equality within your workplace. We hope you'll find this guide useful, and are extremely grateful to the Stonewall Diversity Champions featured throughout who gave us unique insight into the workings of their own groups.

**BEN SUMMERSKILL** Chief Executive, Stonewall

## Contents

<b>1</b>	Introduction	<b>2</b>
<b>2</b>	The business case	<b>3</b>
<b>3</b>	What LGB networks do	<b>6</b>
<b>4</b>	Setting up an LGB network	<b>8</b>
<b>5</b>	Communicating the network	<b>16</b>
	Maintaining and developing the network	<b>19</b>
	Links	<b>21</b>
	Ten steps to setting up an LGB network	<b>22</b>

### NETWORK GROUPS

Setting up networks for lesbian, gay and bisexual employees

#### Stonewall

46 Grosvenor Gardens

London SW1W 0EB

Tel: 020 7881 9440

Minicom: 020 7881 9996

E-mail: [workplace@stonewall.org.uk](mailto:workplace@stonewall.org.uk)

Web: [www.stonewall.org.uk/workplace](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/workplace)

Charity No 1101255

#### Written by Katherine Cowan

Produced for Stonewall by

Working Week Communications

Designed by Lucy Ward

Stonewall Workplace Guides

© Stonewall: 2005

This good practice guide is the first in a series of workplace guides from Stonewall, the UK's leading lesbian and gay equality organisation.

It provides practical advice for employers and employees wanting to set up a lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) employee network group.

It examines the need for LGB networks in the workplace and offers step-by-step guidance for setting up a network that is an effective, long-term resource for employers and employees. It also includes tips to help existing employee networks maintain and develop their purpose.

The guide is based on in-depth research into existing LGB workplace networks. Researchers interviewed 10 organisations of varying sizes and operating in a variety of sectors. All of them are members of Stonewall's Diversity Champions programme and all have active LGB networks.

LGB networks are not a complete diversity solution but they are an important step for employers who want to demonstrate their commitment to eradicating homophobia at work.

# CHAPTER

An LGB employee network group is a formal mechanism for enabling lesbian, gay and bisexual staff to come together to share information and support. Stonewall's research shows that it is a valuable workplace resource that can benefit the organisation, employees, customers and clients.

## Benefits to the organisation

**PROMOTES DIVERSITY** Support for an LGB network explicitly demonstrates an employer's commitment to equality and diversity, and shows that it values all its staff. It highlights that the organisation is a positive career choice, helping to attract and retain talented people.

The **Accenture UK Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans (LGBT) Network** was integral to co-ordinating and winning the firm's bid to sponsor the London Lesbian & Gay Film Festival, which has had a positive impact on the company's public image. A number of new recruits have directly attributed the sponsorship of the event to their interest in the firm. They felt that Accenture's clear stance on sexual orientation and diversity made it a more attractive career option than its competitors.

The **Foreign & Commonwealth Office Lesbian & Gay Group (FLAGG)** helped run the FCO's stall at London's Gay Pride festival in July 2003 to increase awareness among LGB travellers of the FCO's Know Before You Go safe travel campaign. As well as reaching out directly to LGB service users, the stall attracted the attention of individuals who had previously not considered the FCO as a potential employer. FLAGG's presence demonstrated the FCO's positive stance on sexual orientation.

### ENCOURAGES COMPLIANCE WITH EMPLOYMENT LAW

Under the Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003, employers are legally required to tackle homophobia in the

workplace. Supporting an LGB staff network is a good way for employers to show their commitment to tackling homophobia.

**BUILDS EMPLOYEE COMMUNICATION CHANNELS** LGB networks provide an effective consultation mechanism, facilitating communication between organisations and LGB employees. They are a point of contact for employers who want to find out about the concerns of their LGB staff and can be a useful resource for policy makers and diversity trainers.

**ENHANCES CUSTOMER REPUTATION** Where an organisation publicly recognises the value of its LGB employees, LGB customers and clients are more likely to want to access that service or use that product. A three per cent rise in staff satisfaction translates into a one per cent increase in customer satisfaction.

## Benefits for LGB employees

**BUILDS COMMUNICATION CHANNELS** Employee networks give marginalised groups an opportunity to be heard. An LGB network can provide a forum for LGB staff to talk to managers about issues that specifically affect them. Providing a forum for discussion is an important way to build a workforce that feels valued.

**PROVIDES PEER SUPPORT** LGB employees can use a formal network to support each other. The group can also speak up for LGB staff who are experiencing problems at work.

**The Royal Navy Lesbian & Gay Network** was set up after the lifting of the ban on LGB people serving in the armed forces in 1999. Serving in the Royal Navy, particularly when at sea, can be isolating and stressful, and sexual orientation issues, such as discrimination or coming out, can be difficult to deal with alone. The Lesbian & Gay Network aims to support those individuals and help them mitigate crises that could have a negative impact on their health and career. The group's activities are focused on promoting social inclusion and include outreach, peer support and social events. Being able to share and compare their experiences of being LGB in the Navy improves members' confidence, both personally and professionally.

**PROMOTES CAREER PROGRESSION** Employee networks help to create an environment in which LGB staff feel safe to develop their skills and pursue career opportunities. Access to role models and mentors through the network will inspire and build staff confidence. It will also normalise the concept of LGB career success.

## Benefits for customers and clients

**IMPROVES PRODUCTS AND SERVICES** Organisations that deliver services to the public can use their LGB networks to develop a better understanding of the needs and expectations of LGB clients and customers. They can also help identify barriers that LGB customers may face when accessing services or products.

**Barnardo's National LGBT Forum** comprises several regional groups. The forum provides support, advice and information to LGBT colleagues, and ensures the needs of LGBT service users are understood and met, both in policy and practice. The forum has developed the SafeZone initiative. This is a national, LGBT-themed poster campaign and workshop designed to encourage LGBT people to access services and educate non-LGBT staff on how to support and understand LGBT colleagues/service users. Posters depict young LGBT people and LGBT parents and carers. They state explicitly that Barnardo's welcomes LGBT people and does not tolerate homophobia. Traditionally, the child-care sector has not been regarded as an LGBT-friendly environment but the forum, supported by robust anti-discrimination policies, is working to eradicate homophobia, both in employment and service provision.

**Nationwide Group Staff Union's LGBT Advisory Committee** has been involved in a review of company marketing literature. This is to ensure it uses appropriate language and terminology, and images that are truly representative of its diverse customer base.

Formal employee networks provide an opportunity for lesbian, gay and bisexual employees to come together to share information and provide mutual support. They are also a way of opening up communication channels between managers and LGB staff.

## Activities

LGB employee networking activities can range from social events and advocacy to policy development, consultation and training. However, they should be designed to meet clearly identified aims and objectives, and to fulfil the group's organisational and employee purpose.

It is important that groups with a predominantly social networking remit develop, emphasise and publicise their value if they want to achieve more within their organisations. However, to do this effectively, they require employer support.

To garner that support, successful network groups are shifting their objectives and marketing themselves carefully. They are clear about the group's goals and benefits, from both a personal and an organisational perspective.

### Aim: Provide support for LGB staff

#### Activities:

- Hold regular meetings to share experiences and concerns, and an AGM for progress updates and reviews.
- Offer career development using role models, peer support and mentoring schemes.
- Provide information on legislation and discrimination issues.
- Develop support and advocacy systems for members experiencing difficulties.
- Organise social events to encourage participation.

### Aim: Increase understanding of LGB issues

#### Activities:

- Hold information-sharing events, such as speaker sessions and briefings for managers on sexual orientation.
- Provide advice on legislation relating to LGB staff.
- Produce an annual report detailing the group's purpose and activities.
- Set up systems for consulting LGB staff, customers and clients.

# 2

## CHAPTER

### Aim: Contribute to the diversity agenda

#### Activities:

- Assist with policy development.
- Review organisation's marketing literature for LGB visibility and appropriateness of language.
- Advise on diversity initiatives such as sexual orientation monitoring and training.
- Advise on recruitment and retention strategy and practice.
- Encourage employers to sponsor and participate in LGB events.
- Network with other groups, such as ethnic minority or women's networks, to share information and best practice.
- Promote the organisation as a leader in LGB equality.

Until 1991, LGB people were banned from serving in the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) and when the **FCO Lesbian & Gay Group (FLAGG)** formed in 1998 there were still a number of discriminatory policies in place. These included tagging the files of LGB staff, and informing ambassadors of out LGB postings. Working with policy makers in the FCO, FLAGG ensured these policies were abandoned. Since then, FLAGG has worked with the FCO for full recognition and equal benefits for same-sex couples. Its clear aims and professional approach have gained FLAGG the support of the FCO's equal opportunities team and senior managers, lending it credibility and respect within government. The group works with FCO management in making representations to other governments to expand opportunities for partners of LGB staff overseas and to give LGB staff more choices of where they go and how they develop their careers.

At **KPMG**, professional networking is key both to developing business opportunities and developing and retaining staff. **Breathe** is a social networking group for LGB people and those interested in LGB issues at KPMG in the UK. The group organises regular social activities including evening drinks, restaurant visits and theatre trips. It also organises joint events with LGB networks from other firms. Group members have benefited from increased confidence, and from a chance to make business contacts, establish friendships and gain support from people who have faced issues relating to their sexuality at work.

**Nationwide Group Staff Union's LGBT Advisory Committee** participated in a diversity training video with specific coverage of sexual orientation issues. The video has been widely circulated as part of the organisation's diversity training package, and the group has now gained approval to make it compulsory viewing for all employees.

The **Merrill Lynch Rainbow Professional Network** has hosted a number of speaker events, including a reception for The Rt. Hon Chris Smith, former Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, who talked about his political career and the challenges he faced as one of the first openly gay members of parliament. The events are open to all staff and other city-based professional networks.

## Establishing an LGB employee network requires:

- clear aims and objectives
- top-level buy-in and HR support
- a robust business plan
- a structure that fits the organisation
- membership guidelines
- resources to run the network effectively and professionally
- a confidentiality policy.

## Aims and objectives

When developing a network's aims and objectives, it is important to be clear about what the group wants to achieve. This in turn will depend on the size of the organisation, the sector it is in and its awareness of LGB issues. A good starting point is to research how the organisation fares in terms of LGB equality.

### Questions to ask might include:

- Are people policies and initiatives fully inclusive of LGB diversity?
- Do LGB employees feel supported and comfortable being out at work?
- What is the external reputation of the organisation among LGB people?

An LGB network could help bridge gaps that emerge. However, its aims and objectives also need to reflect the corporate agenda. Senior managers are more likely to support the initiative and give it credibility if the network is seen to serve the organisation as well as its employees.

### The purpose of the network could include:

- championing LGB issues for employees, customers and clients
- contributing to the organisation's inclusion and diversity agenda
- raising awareness of the impact of relevant legislation
- advising on policy development
- ensuring policy is applied in practice
- improving the work environment for LGB employees
- supporting LGB employees and enabling them to develop their careers
- ensuring LGB staff can be open about their sexual orientation if they want to be
- encouraging the recruitment and retention of talented LGB employees
- networking with other groups to build the profile of the organisation.

**Nationwide Group Staff Union's LGBT Advisory Committee** has the following aims and objectives:

**Main aim** – To work in partnership with Nationwide Group to create a safe, inclusive and diverse working environment that encourages a culture of respect and equality for everyone regardless of their sexual orientation, in order that every individual can reach their full potential without fear of discrimination.

### Objectives

1. To be a representative group of Nationwide Group Staff Union providing advice and consultancy to Nationwide Group in relation to legislation and equality issues; to increase overall understanding in relation to legislation and equality issues; to increase overall understanding across the whole business of the difficulties and challenges faced by LGBT people, both within the organisation and in the wider community.
2. To provide a social and support network to members, who may be LGBT or have friends or family members who are LGBT, irrespective of whether or not they choose to disclose their sexual orientation.
3. To work with Nationwide Group on sexual orientation equality initiatives that benefit not only its internal employees through increased awareness and education, but also make a significant contribution to existing and potential customers and ultimately to society as a whole.

## Top-level buy-in

Our research suggests that harnessing the support of senior colleagues is critical to ensuring the long-term success of an LGB network. A good way of doing this is to seek out an executive sponsor, for example, someone with an HR or diversity remit. A message of support from a senior champion helps deter cynicism, homophobia and managers' reluctance to allow staff to participate. It also adds credibility and clout to the group's aims and objectives, boosting its internal profile.

However, networks that focus purely on the social aspect of the group without acknowledging the needs of the wider organisation will find it harder to get senior managers to buy in and are likely to find themselves marginalised.

**Bedfordshire Gay Police Association** is a local branch of the national Gay Police Association (GPA). It was set up under the existing infrastructure of the GPA with the support of the Chief Constable who saw the group as a valuable tool for furthering the force's diversity work. The Chief Constable recognised the benefits it would provide for the workforce and the service it could offer the wider community, so allocated time to develop it. With this senior support, the group has been proactive in its outreach work with LGB communities in Bedfordshire. For example, it has developed initiatives to increase the reporting of hate crime. These have been publicised in LGB venues and on the force's website.

## The business plan

A business plan illustrating the need for the group will keep it focused and give it credibility within the organisation. It can also help tackle cynicism or the reluctance of other staff and managers to support the group.

### The business plan

- should set out:**
- the aims of the group
  - proposed activities
  - the legal context
  - benefits to the organisation, its staff and customers
  - funding requirements
  - operational structure
  - key contacts.

The HR manager or diversity champion should be able to help draft the network's business plan.

The **Accenture UK LGBT Network** was spearheaded by an employee who had seen evidence of groups set up by competitors. She felt Accenture's lack of engagement with LGB employees was a disadvantage for the firm, both in terms of developing existing talent and recruiting new talent. The Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003 were due to come into effect, and the firm was rapidly developing its diversity agenda. The employee found a mentor from another firm's LGB network and approached a senior contact in Accenture who agreed that the firm needed to demonstrate its commitment to promoting LGB diversity. She also gathered the support of LGB colleagues through word of mouth. Together, they developed a business case for the network and used this to win the support of an executive sponsor. HR colleagues were also brought on board and lent clout and credibility to the group's intentions.

## Structure

To be effective, an LGB network group should be embedded within the organisation. This means ensuring clear lines of communication and accountability at all levels of the organisation.

However, the structure of the network will also depend on how many people are able to take on network responsibilities. Some networks are led by one or two co-ordinators, while others are run by an elected and/or voluntary steering committee.

In multi-site organisations, the LGB network might want to set up regional branches. These can be co-ordinated locally with strategic direction and support from head office. Holding regular national meetings can be unrealistic, so some groups hold weekend events that all members can attend.

For virtual or remote workers, the LGB network group could be a purely e-mail network that meets only occasionally in real time.

The **Foreign & Commonwealth Office Lesbian & Gay Group (FLAGG)** is an international group, with the majority of members on overseas postings. To facilitate their input, they are invited to contribute their views via e-mail before all meetings.

International organisations may be able to learn from, and use, the existing infrastructure of overseas LGB networks. With the support and experience of their overseas colleagues, groups can develop to meet the particular needs of UK businesses and staff.



**Manchester City Council LGBT Employee Group** is part of a broader support system for LGBT staff and plays an integral role in the council's work to engage with its LGBT service users. The group is split into two sections (a full group and a core group) and is accountable to the council's Lesbian & Gay Development Group.

**MCC LGBT Employee Group – Full Group** Runs two quarterly meetings for all members – two during work time, two outside work time. These meetings usually involve updates from the core group, speaker events and discussions.

**MCC LGBT Employee Group – Core Group** Consists of 10 members working on behalf of LGBT staff and the council. It meets monthly to discuss, for example, training, mentoring, the annual report, policy and sponsorship. This core group takes the concerns of the full group to the development group.

**Lesbian & Gay Development Group** A group of senior officers chaired by the deputy chief executive. It has a strategic role and feeds information between senior managers and the MCC LGBT Employee Group. Its regular meetings focus on service improvement and employment issues.

To integrate LGBT equality across all council functions, representatives from the core group also sit on other Manchester City Council working groups. Core group members are supported by two co-chairs and a secretary, and they take individual responsibility for the following areas: training, development, events, socials, budget, administration, lesbian issues, gay men's issues and trans issues.

## Membership

**Membership of the network could be:**

- exclusive – open only to LGBT colleagues
- inclusive – open to all staff with an interest in LGBT issues.

There are pros and cons with both approaches. For example, in an exclusive LGBT network employees who are not out at work may be more inclined to attend meetings. Such a network would

also encourage open discussion of personal experiences. However, colleagues and managers may consider the group to be insular or divisive.

Meanwhile, an inclusive network can broaden people's understanding of LGB discrimination, which is vital for change to happen. It would also enable heterosexual colleagues with LGB family or friends to access information and support. However, it could discourage colleagues who are not out from participating in the group.

A workable compromise would be to keep some activities, such as socials and mentoring, exclusively LGB while others, such as information-sharing events, remain open to all staff. This would ensure that key stakeholders, including HR managers and executive sponsors, are able to continue championing the network across the organisation.

Stonewall's research has shown that lesbians and bisexual women tend to be under-represented among LGB network members.

**There are a number of ways to encourage women to participate,**

**such as:**

- appointing two co-chairs, one male and one female
- ensuring women are always represented on steering groups and committees, therefore encouraging women colleagues to become role models and advocates
- holding social events at gay women's venues rather than relying on male venues
- inviting women to attend meetings early and network beforehand
- making links with the organisation's women's network, to share information and good practice.

**KPMG's Breathe** group realised that very few lesbians and bisexual women were attending events. In response it appointed a women's officer to the group's executive board. Her role is to identify the specific issues that lesbians and bisexual women at KPMG face, and to identify the issues they share with colleagues.

## Resources

LGB networks need two major resources: personnel and time. Much of the planning and development is carried out by individuals in addition to their normal workload. Best practice employers acknowledge this by recognising during performance review the work active members put in to the network and its positive impact on their development.

Some organisations allow LGB network members with co-ordinating responsibilities time off to dedicate to the group. The most successful networks tend to operate in organisations where managers are encouraged to let employees attend meetings during office hours.

Organisations that are serious about their LGB networks should also provide funds to meet the costs of events such as speaker expenses, travel and communications. Some organisations have diversity budgets to meet these costs, others offer funding on a more ad hoc basis. Both the HR and finance departments should be able to help identify how network co-ordinators can apply for funding. It is worth finding out how other staff groups in the business have met their costs.

## Confidentiality

Enabling colleagues who are not out to participate in the LGB network is a challenge. No one, regardless of his or her sexual orientation, has the right to disclose other people's sexual orientation. Their reasons for not being out may be personal or symptomatic of an organisational culture. There are a number of ways of helping not-out colleagues to participate in the network or access information, if they wish, while retaining their anonymity.

### They could include:

- setting out a well-publicised confidentiality policy
- holding meetings at external venues and out of office hours
- using closed/anonymous e-mail lists
- omitting names of not-out colleagues from minutes of meetings
- setting up an internet group e-mail account, outside the office system
- operating a confidential voicemail for people without access to e-mail
- using external websites to host resources and information that people can access from home.

LGBT staff wishing to participate in **Barnardo's National LGBT Forum** are supported by their managers and are given time off to attend meetings. Their expenses (such as travel and accommodation if required) are covered by their individual departments. To include colleagues who are not out at work, the forum holds some meetings out of office hours and has a budget to cover the expenses of individuals who do not want to ask their managers to authorise the payment.

## 4 CHAPTER

It is essential to communicate across the organisation a network's inception, purpose, activities and achievements.

**Effective communication enables the network to:**

- announce its launch
- gain and retain the support of senior managers
- encourage LGB colleagues to participate
- distribute diversity information to the wider workforce
- mitigate cynicism towards LGB initiatives
- demonstrate to the wider world the organisation's commitment to diversity.

There are a variety of tools that LGB networks can exploit.

### Make use of existing communication systems

**These could include:**

**COMPANY INTRANET** Create an LGB network page or use a section within existing diversity pages. Network information could include aims, events, news, fact sheets, useful internal and external links and FAQs.

**ELECTRONIC BULLETINS** Use them to publicise the group's activities and achievements. They are a good way of ensuring all staff, not just LGB colleagues, are aware of the group and its value to the organisation.

**IN-HOUSE MAGAZINE** Consider submitting articles about the group, and on discrimination, good practice and LGB employment issues more generally.

### Ensure all staff are aware of the network

**Mass communication tools in the workplace might include:**

**PAYSLIPS** Include a message with payslips to announce the network's launch and events.

**INDUCTION TRAINING** Produce a leaflet about the group to be included in packs for new staff. Ensure the group is mentioned in any induction presentation on equality and diversity or employee network groups more generally.

**POSTERS** Make use of notice boards in all offices and sites. Think especially about where staff with limited access to e-mail and less corporate involvement – for example, cleaners and security staff – might see them.

### Keep in touch with members

**To ensure members feel safe when participating in the LGB network, it is worth considering:**

**GENERIC E-MAIL ADDRESS** (such as LGB@organisation.co.uk) This would provide an easy point of contact, separate from co-ordinators' existing work in-boxes.

**INTERNET E-MAIL ACCOUNT** This could be set up for people who do not want to use the office system.

**EXTERNAL WEBSITE** This is a useful way of sharing information on the group and sends out a positive message to other audiences about the organisation's commitment to diversity.

5 CHAPTER

**GLOBE (Gay, Lesbian or Bisexual Employees)** is the Ford Motor Company's UK LGB employee resource. GLOBE uses a range of tools to impart its message:

**www.fordglobe.org:** this independent website is hosted by the US GLOBE chapter, and features a UK section. UK GLOBE's objectives are set out, along with pages on news, the regions, support and officers' contact details. The site is a valuable resource for new employees as well as group members and LGB employees who would rather access information at home.

**Intranet:** GLOBE has pages on Ford's intranet system where all colleagues can access information about the group, and find out more about LGB employment issues.

**Internal communications:** GLOBE communicates with each member every quarter via e-mail. The group has set up two distribution lists: one using the company's internal system, and one using an internet group e-mail, for members who prefer not to use the office system.

**Corporate communications:** GLOBE news is featured on the company's internal television network, which runs in the offices and plants. The group has also had coverage in the company magazine.

**Posters:** GLOBE awareness-raising posters are displayed on all the diversity notice-boards in the UK, in both offices and plants. Some also have details of local LGB community groups.

**Diversity Week:** GLOBE runs workshops and information stands during the company's annual Diversity Week.

**External communications:** GLOBE has produced flags and banners and has attended Pride events, sending out a positive message to LGB communities about Ford as a manufacturer and an employer.

Once an organisation's LGB network has been established, it is important to maintain and develop it. It needs to continue to be a valuable organisational resource as well as retaining members' interest.

Publicise the group externally

This will send a positive message to customers, potential recruits, competitors and the existing workforce.

Try:

**MEDIA COVERAGE** Pink and mainstream press can highlight the group's activities and the organisation's achievements on LGB equality.

**JOB FAIRS** If the organisation participates in job fairs, display information about the LGB network. It will reassure potential recruits that the organisation values and respects diversity.

**Manchester City Council LGBT Employee Group** used a significant proportion of its original budget developing its publicity, which included a logo that it now uses on postcards, posters and banners. This helps the group to promote its existence and achievements to LGBT staff and the wider organisation. It also provides tools to market the council externally as a service provider and an employer that recognises the rights and needs of LGBT people.

Keeping it relevant

Consult members periodically to find out what they want from the group and use feedback forms to gather views on specific events and future activities. Several of the network groups that Stonewall interviewed review their aims and objectives annually.

Give managers the chance to feed into the group's development by consulting senior supporters and other key stakeholders. Find out, as well, what LGB staff who do not participate think about the group. They also benefit from any positive cultural changes that the network inspires in the workplace, so their views are important. Sending an organisation-wide e-mail or memo, assuring staff that responses will remain confidential, is one way of contacting non-members.

Organisations that monitor sexual orientation of staff will know the proportion of the workforce that is LGB, and will know if they have an unusually low network participation rate. If a significant group of LGB staff are not participating in the network, try to find out what is stopping them. It could be something about the way the group is structured, such as an all-male steering group or a lack of ethnic minority LGB role models.

Finally, be sure to publicise any changes that result from consultation with members, non-members and managers. This will reassure respondents that their views count and make it more likely that they will participate in future.

## Cross-strand networking

People are likely to belong to more than one diversity group, or strand. An Asian lesbian, or a bisexual man with a disability are not just LGBT. It makes sense to engage in cross-strand networking with other groups to share information and good practice.

Many organisations have well-established women's networks and ethnic minority staff groups. They may also have disability networks, faith networks and parenting groups. These are a valuable resource for new LGBT networks that can learn from their experiences.

Make contact with external groups too, across the sector and beyond. This will facilitate further sharing of good practice and increase professional networking opportunities for group members.

**Cross-strand and cross-sector networking activities might include:**

- speaker events
- joint social events
- participation in equality and diversity events, both internal and external.

**The Rainbow Professional Network** at Merrill Lynch was established with support from the American Rainbow Professional Network. The US network was able to offer the benefit of its experience, infrastructure and broad global objectives, as well as guidance on brand and logo identity. The co-chairs of the UK group liaised with other employee network groups within Merrill Lynch to develop their learning. They also collaborated with external networks for gay professionals from within the same industry.

## Developing leadership skills

LGBT networks are a good way of helping LGBT employees to develop their skills and confidence through mentoring, identifying role models and simple networking. Staff who take on a co-ordinating role will also develop their leadership skills.

However, specific training provided by the employer could further enhance the group's capacity. This could include training in project and events management, presentation skills, consultation and policy development. Best practice employers recognise, at performance review, the impact that taking part in the network is having on members' competencies.

At **Ford**, the annual Chairman's Leadership Awards for Diversity officially recognise employees whose actions have made a positive difference and furthered the company's aim to be a leader in diversity issues. Award categories include Most Inspirational Employee Resource Group. This recognises "any form of education and awareness-raising within the company, together with added value through maximising business links with potential customers, suppliers and local communities".

The Foreign & Commonwealth Office has recognised the importance of **FLAGG (Foreign & Commonwealth Office Lesbian & Gay Group)** by adding the role of co-ordinator to a post-holder's job description. This means that network achievements are recognised at co-ordinators' appraisals.

**Thanks to the following Stonewall Diversity Champions who took part in this research:**

**Accenture:** [www.accenture.com](http://www.accenture.com)

**Barnardo's:** [www.barnardos.org.uk](http://www.barnardos.org.uk)

**Bedfordshire Police:**  
[www.bedfordshire.police.uk](http://www.bedfordshire.police.uk)

**Foreign & Commonwealth Office:**  
[www.fco.gov.uk](http://www.fco.gov.uk)

**Ford:** [www.ford.com](http://www.ford.com)

**KPMG:** [www.kpmg.co.uk](http://www.kpmg.co.uk)

**Manchester City Council:**  
[www.manchester.gov.uk](http://www.manchester.gov.uk)

**Merrill Lynch:** [www.ml.com](http://www.ml.com)

**Nationwide:** [www.nationwide.co.uk](http://www.nationwide.co.uk)

**Royal Navy:** [www.royal-navy.mod.uk](http://www.royal-navy.mod.uk)

**Stonewall Diversity Champions Programme**

Stonewall's Diversity Champions programme is Britain's good practice forum on sexual orientation in which employers can work with Stonewall, and with each other, to promote diversity in the workplace.  
[www.stonewall.org.uk/diversitychampions](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/diversitychampions)

For further information on Stonewall's workplace initiatives, including the Corporate Equality Index of the top 100 employers in the UK for gay people, the recruitment guide *Starting Out* and the Stonewall Leadership Programme, go to [www.stonewall.org.uk/workplace](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/workplace).

# TEN STEPS TO SETTING UP AN LGB NETWORK GROUP

- 1 Research other LGB employee networks to find out what has worked for them.
- 2 Establish the business case for a network in your organisation. This should include benefits to the business and not just to LGB employees.
- 3 Find a senior management sponsor who can argue your case across the organisation. Get the HR team on board as well.
- 4 Set out the aims of the network. These could include advising on diversity policy and practice, or helping LGB staff develop their careers.
- 5 Draw up a business plan that sets out the purpose of the group, its proposed activities and funding requirements.
- 6 Ensure that network co-ordinators have the time to make it work. Many employers give co-ordinators time off each month for network business.
- 7 Establish criteria for network membership, setting out whether the network is exclusive to LGB staff or open to all staff with an interest in LGB issues.
- 8 Publicise the group internally, through e-mail and the company intranet, and externally, through pink and mainstream press.
- 9 Respect the privacy of network members and non-members who are not out at work. Consider using internet e-mail accounts or an external website.
- 10 Consult regularly all network stakeholders – members and managers – to ensure it stays relevant to the business and to LGB staff.

SUPPORTED BY



**AVIVA**



**MORLEY**  
Fund Management

**NETWORK GROUPS**



**Stonewall**  
[www.stonewall.org.uk](http://www.stonewall.org.uk)