

# Practice Guide: Creating a Juvenile Justice LGBTQ Task Force

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### Information

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# Introduction

In the last decade, attention has increased with respect to the number of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ)<sup>1</sup> youth involved in the juvenile justice system. Research (Irvine, 2014) demonstrates that approximately 20% of youth in the juvenile justice system nationally identify as LGBQ or gender nonconforming (GNC),<sup>2</sup> while the general youth population consists of about 7% LGB youth (Mitchum & Moodie-Mills, 2014). Realizing it is necessary to consider a youth's sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression (SOGIE)<sup>3</sup> in order to provide appropriate treatment and services, a number of jurisdictions adopted LGBTQ-inclusive policies at their detention centers and began searching for resources for LGBTQ youth and their families. The US Department of Justice also released the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) standards, which call for specific protections for LGBT and intersex<sup>4</sup> adult inmates and juvenile residents.<sup>5</sup>

In addition, various policy experts and foundations have encouraged government agencies to work together with community-based organizations (CBO) and families to find solutions that keep youth out of the

juvenile justice system. For example, the Annie E. Casey Foundation published a number of guides detailing the work of various collaborations (Feely, 1999). In an effort to adopt policies and/or establish community relationships so that LGBTQ youth and their families have access to supportive resources, some jurisdictions convened LGBTQ task forces or workgroups. The purpose of this practice guide is to provide instruction regarding how to establish a task force along with guidance on handling possible challenges to this work. This guide is directed toward the individual or group of individuals within a jurisdiction who are charged with convening and facilitating such a task force.

The development of this guide was informed by a collaboration between the National Council on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD) and a probation department in California to develop a comprehensive non-discrimination policy. The process included multiple government agencies and leaders from the LGBTQ community, the straight and cisgender<sup>6</sup> communities, faith communities, and communities of color, as well as representatives from the intersections of all of those communities, e.g., LGBTQ people of color.

<sup>1</sup>A lesbian is a girl who is emotionally, romantically, and sexually attracted to other girls. Gay means a boy who is emotionally, romantically, and sexually attracted to other boys. Bisexual refers to a boy or girl who is emotionally, romantically, and sexually attracted to both boys and girls. Transgender describes a person whose gender identity and/or gender expression does not match the sex and/or gender the person was assigned at birth. Questioning describes a person who is exploring their sexual orientation, gender identity, and/or gender expression. While the acronym LGBTQ will be used for the most part throughout this guide, less-inclusive acronyms (LGBQ, LGB, LGBT) will be used when referring directly to research or policy that uses them.

<sup>2</sup>Gender nonconforming describes someone whose gender identity and/or expression breaks societal norms (e.g., someone who identifies as a girl but wears clothing typically assigned to boys).

<sup>3</sup>Sexual orientation is about to whom an individual is emotionally, sexually, or romantically attracted. Gender identity refers to how a person sees himself/herself and understands his/her own gender (a man, a woman, other). Gender expression describes how a person expresses gender identity through manner of dress, speech, behavior, and/or other physical attributes.

<sup>4</sup>The lack of discussion in this guide about people who are intersex is not meant to be an oversight. While PREA and many other policies address people born with intersex conditions, this guide focuses on LGBTQ youth because more research and information on their experiences in the juvenile justice system is available.

<sup>5</sup>See <http://www.prearesourcecenter.org/library/488/standards/department-of-justice-national-prea-standards>

<sup>6</sup>Cisgender is a relative newcomer in the lexicon, believed to be derived by transgender activists to denote a person whose gender identity matches the gender assigned at birth. For example, people who are assigned "female" at birth are expected to follow society's rules for "girls/women" because "girl/woman" is typically the "gender" assigned to someone whose sex at birth is "female." If someone who was assigned "female" at birth also identifies as a woman, then that person is cisgender. The prefix "cis" means "on the near side of." If someone's gender identity is the opposite of their sex assigned at birth, many people would call them "transgender." The prefix "trans" means "across, beyond, through." See <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/cis> and <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/trans->



# The Role of the Task Force



It is important to clearly define the role of the task force. What is the purpose of the task force? Is the goal to develop a non-discrimination policy as well as offer assistance with implementing that policy? Is it to establish relationships in the community so that government systems can learn more about the community resources that are available to youth and their families? Is it to create a mechanism for ongoing training and “coaching” or technical assistance to the court, attorneys, and institutional and probation staff regarding the equitable and fair treatment of LGBTQ and GNC youth under their care? Does it

include multiple purposes? It is important to know the answers to these questions before reaching out to stakeholders; they will want to know what their participation entails and its duration. Depending on the goal, a task force can convene for a long time—over a period of years, especially if the main goal is to adopt a new policy. Of course, some goals might change once the task force convenes and everyone begins submitting their input. However, it is important to have an initial goal in mind before setting up meetings with stakeholders. The following outlines the steps for convening a juvenile justice LGBTQ task force.

# Intersecting Identities

It is imperative for intersectionality—the consideration of each youth’s multiple identities—to drive the goals and decisions made by the task force. If the goal of the task force is to improve the treatment of *all* LGBTQ and GNC youth in your county’s juvenile facilities, then you must consider how to intentionally incorporate the other identities of this population; otherwise you risk further marginalizing certain members of the group. LGBTQ youth are not solely made up of their sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression—they are a web of identities, each one lending itself to another community; culture; set of experiences, values, and needs. For example, a young person is not only gay, but also male, undocumented, and Catholic. A young person is not only a transgender girl, but also White, in the child welfare system, and experiencing homelessness. A young person is not only a lesbian, but also Black, GNC, living with a supportive family, and consistently “stopped and frisked” by law enforcement.

While it is impossible to meet every need of each youth’s intersecting identities, consider identifying three to five demographics to consistently contemplate throughout your process. In addition to SOGIE, it is crucial for one of these demographics to be race. LGBTQ people are typically portrayed as White, largely due to the misconception that people of color are more homophobic than White people. This is harmful logic that makes LGBTQ youth of color in the system virtually invisible, heightening their risk of recidivism and deeper involvement in the system. In fact, 85% of LGBT and GNC youth in the juvenile justice system are of color (Irvine, 2014).

When considering race as a demographic, it is important to recognize the myth that straight and

cisgender communities of color, particularly Black and Latino communities, are more rejecting of their LGBTQ and GNC family and community members and more likely to oppose LGBTQ rights than their White counterparts. Research that challenges this myth is available,<sup>7</sup> and many LGBTQ and GNC Black and Latino people report love and acceptance in their families and communities. It is important to remember that though Black, Asian, and Latino LGBTQ people report discrimination from White LGBTQ community members, it is not well-publicized (Battle, Cohen, Warren, Ferguson, & Audam, 2002; Dang & Vianney, 2007; Diaz & Ayala, 2005). Moreover, few LGBTQ people of color are in visible positions of leadership to address these issues.

Therefore, it is critical for task force members to:

1. Understand that straight and cisgender communities of color are not more rejecting of their youth;
2. Remember that LGBTQ and GNC youth of color may experience discrimination and rejection in predominately White LGBTQ community centers and programs; and
3. Ensure that LGBTQ individuals of color are reflected in the leadership of the task force so that White LGBTQ voices do not overpower those of color.

In addition to race, language, socioeconomic status, religion, immigration status, child welfare histories, and other experiences present challenges to LGBTQ youth. Data on youth in the system you are addressing should guide your task force’s decision regarding other identities to consider when determining the scope of its work.

<sup>7</sup>See <http://www.socialjusticesexuality.com>; <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/03/17/support-for-gay-marriage-up-among-black-protestants-in-last-year-flat-among-white-evangelicals>; and [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/11/13/latinos-gay-marriage-exit-polls\\_n\\_2124515.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/11/13/latinos-gay-marriage-exit-polls_n_2124515.html)

# Recruitment and Retention

Recruiting and retaining a task force with expertise regarding the juvenile justice system, systems that feed young people into the juvenile justice system, the needs of LGBTQ youth, and communities of color requires vision, mindfulness, energy, and creativity.

Several components are required. Members must be recruited from multiple county organizations, LGBTQ communities, and communities of color. Given that many faith-based organizations provide crucial services, especially in communities of color, their participation is also vital. Recruiting youth who have been involved with the juvenile justice system, while challenging, is critical to identifying the needs and gaps in services that they experience. Task force participation can also provide young people with an opportunity to be heard and can be a very empowering experience for them. Again, it is crucial to reiterate the importance of considering intersectionality when recruiting members from the community for the task force. Let this guide your process and ensure that the task force has the diversity necessary to both adopt a policy and connect agencies and families to appropriate community resources.

## Agreement With Probation Department

Prior to beginning any work, an agreement, which may or may not be in writing, should be in place with the probation department (or the appropriate juvenile justice agency) to convene and facilitate the task force. Usually, the agency will ask for assistance with convening a task force after realizing it needs to provide better services to the agency's LGBTQ youth population. Sometimes a community activist, a CBO, a youth, or a youth's family members will come to seek help regarding LGBTQ concerns with the agency. Either way, several conversations with the agency

chief or director will be necessary in order to obtain permission and buy-in for the task force.

## Identifying the Stakeholders

When convening a task force focused on LGBTQ youth in the juvenile justice system, the presence of some obvious and not-so-obvious stakeholders will be necessary for the successful adoption, implementation, and enforcement of LGBTQ-inclusive policies. Individuals representing specific agencies and organizations should be endowed with the authority to make decisions on behalf of their employers.

What follows is a recommended, but not exhaustive, list of stakeholders. You should consider the particular composition of your community and identify stakeholders as appropriate. This list was created for a county task force; a statewide task force would be enhanced with the addition of more counties and agencies. While inclusivity is very important, the size of the task force should be manageable. If some key individuals cannot serve on the task force because it is too big or does not fit with their schedules, their input can be sought through other means, such as convening a smaller, one-time focus group of those stakeholders.

### County Agencies

- Probation (chief of the probation department and director[s] of the juvenile facilities and probation/community services, both of whom should appoint appropriate line staff from their divisions)
- Health care
- Behavioral/mental health care
- Social services, specifically a representative from child welfare services
- District attorney/prosecutor's office





- Public defender's office
- Juvenile court (presiding judge or someone appointed by the judge)
- Juvenile justice and delinquency prevention commission (or similar commission)
- County office of education (or the educational office that provides services at the detention center)
- Board of supervisors

### **City Agencies**

- Local school district (preferably the one that sends the largest percentage of youth into the juvenile justice system)
- Local police department (preferably the one that sends the largest percentage of youth into the juvenile justice system)
- Local human services agency (preferably the one that funds or provides the most services to juvenile justice-involved youth and their families)

### **Subject-Matter Experts**

These are researchers, policy analysts, advocates, etc., who can provide the task force with the necessary research and knowledge to help guide the discussions.

In many cases, these people work for CBOs (see below) that you will be contacting as part of task force member recruitment.

### **CBOs**

- LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ youth-serving programs
- Faith-based organizations and programs
- Anti-violence/violence prevention programs
- Health
- Employment
- Housing
- Foster care
- Juvenile justice/criminal justice
- Prisoner rights
- Programs serving commercially sexually exploited children
- CBOs led by people of color

### **Youth**

LGBTQ and GNC youth who have been involved in the juvenile justice system are the experts with respect to their experiences so their inclusion is critical. Additionally, the participation of straight and cisgender youth who have been privy to the treatment of LGBTQ and GNC youth in the juvenile justice system is also important. Those working to convene a task force should decide on the age range that defines youth. Many public and private agencies extend "youth" to age 25 instead of 17 or 18. Obtaining and maintaining youth involvement on a task force can present challenges, some of which are described in greater detail below.

### **Parents/Guardians**

- Parents/guardians of LGBTQ and GNC youth who have been involved with the juvenile justice system

## Cultivating Relationships With Stakeholders

It is absolutely critical to obtain meetings with the heads (directors, chief executive officers, executive directors, etc.) of the various agencies, departments, and organizations that you wish to have representation on the task force. The purpose of these meetings is to explain the mission of the task force and the importance of each agency as a stakeholder. If meeting with an agency head is not possible, then a meeting should be scheduled with someone else in a decision-making role with the agency. Be aware of each agency's mission and initiatives. Then, when creating the meeting agenda, note how the goals of the task force will further the goals of that particular agency. For example, if you are meeting with the executive director of an organization that works on anti-violence programs, note the research showing that gay, bisexual, and questioning boys are more likely to be detained for both violent and weapons offenses. This will help connect the goals and mission of the organization and the task force.

At first, the task of cultivating relationships with the aforementioned stakeholders may seem daunting, especially if you do not already know people in the

various agencies and CBOs of interest. If this is the case, do not be discouraged. Many people working in social justice fields and government agencies know more people than they realize. Begin with the relationships you already have and ask those people to make introductions for you. Once those networks are exhausted, start brainstorming your "connectors" (Gladwell, 2002). Connectors are people skilled in introducing people to each other. Their contact lists typically include a multifaceted group of individuals in various fields. Connectors may be your friends instead of people you know professionally. Many people are surprised to learn the connections that are available to them in their casual social networks. When the connector route is exhausted, direct calls to those in leadership positions may be necessary. Be prepared to send a short but detailed email or have your pitch ready to deliver via phone, and know that you are more likely to speak with an assistant prior to being connected to the person in leadership. Keep in mind that assistants are very important gatekeepers; do not underestimate the power they hold. Approach assistants with respect and be prepared to answer their questions so they have enough information to share with the person in leadership with whom you hope to speak.





# Facilitating the Task Force

A number of factors, including the following, can make your meetings more successful.

## Location

Once all stakeholders are identified, a decision should be made as to who will have oversight of the task force for the long term and where it will meet. In most jurisdictions, the probation department oversees youth involved with the juvenile justice system so that department will have responsibility for the task force. A specific meeting location should be identified. In many cases, the probation department will host the meetings at one of their facilities. Another option is to identify several meeting locations so that task force members can share the burden of getting to locations that are more convenient for some than for others. If young people will be involved in the process, it is important to consider meeting in a location that is accessible by public transportation.

## Layout of the Room

Care should be exercised when choosing the room and layout. The room should not be too large. If it is larger than necessary, ensure that the tables and chairs are not too far apart. Generally, it is best to arrange the tables in a U-shape or a square so that everyone can see each other. The chairs should be spaced far enough apart to allow each individual some personal space and a sufficient writing area. If tables or chairs are too far apart, people might feel alienated from each other. Some may feel intimidated, as if the “higher ups” are “staying away” from those who are not perceived to be in positions of power, especially pertaining to the agencies that are represented. This is especially important for youth who are task force members to feel included.

Because the task force members will meet multiple times over a period of months, if not years, they need to feel some level of camaraderie with at least a few other people on the task force. The physical environment should be small enough to foster these relationships. Additionally, especially if a policy is being adopted, the room needs enough space to allow for breakout groups (small groups of four to five people) to discuss various policy recommendations. Small groups allow for more substantive discussion than can occur in the large-group setting within the meeting’s timeframe. Many youth prefer speaking in smaller groups because it feels less intimidating. If the room itself will not allow for breakout groups, investigate whether other nearby rooms can be assigned for this purpose.

## Content

The first meeting should begin with introductions that include name, agency/organization, and preferred gender pronoun(s). This allows facilitators to introduce the idea that gender identity is not necessarily determined by physical appearance. It also allows participants to request use of the pronoun with which they feel most comfortable.

After an icebreaker or similar exercise, the meeting should move into an overview of LGBTQ and GNC youth involved in the juvenile justice system. Given the unknown numbers of crossover or dually involved youth (those with both child welfare and juvenile justice involvement), research on LGBTQ and GNC youth involved in the child welfare system should be included.



## Meals

Depending on meeting times, task force members should be offered breakfast, lunch, or light refreshments at every meeting. It is helpful to create a list of everyone's dietary restrictions prior to the first meeting.

## Materials

Placards with individual and agency names should be supplied for every meeting, at least until everyone knows each other's names. Other helpful materials include the following:

- Charting paper and markers for notes and group exercises.

- Discs containing articles, research, laws, organizations, and resources pertaining to LGBTQ and GNC youth in the child welfare system and/or juvenile justice system. Discs reduce the need for distributing a lot of paper and are easier to transport. Each task force member should receive a disc at the first meeting. As the months go by, members can receive new information via email and save it to their discs in order to keep an updated electronic library on LGBTQ and GNC youth.
- Handouts that cover any information that could not be added to the discs and/or for icebreaker and group exercise instructions.

# Drafting a Comprehensive Policy



If drafting a policy is the main goal of the task force, be prepared for a lengthy process depending on the level of stakeholder involvement. For a policy change to be made, it is important to identify at the outset what needs to happen and who needs to be involved. Participants may become discouraged if the policy is not passed within a timeframe that meets expectations, which makes it important to discuss those expectations early in the process. Task force members might be excited and stay engaged for the first six months, then start to cut back on meeting attendance. It is important to discuss ways for people to stay engaged. Talk to task force members about what keeps them coming to the meetings and what might impede their attendance. Maybe the location should change. Maybe a social hour outside of the task force meeting is needed. Maybe the youth on the task force do not feel included, and they need a separate time to meet.

If policy change is the main goal of the task force, then most of its time and attention will be devoted

to this. With several model policies in place across the country, there is no need to reinvent the wheel. The most judicious use of the task force's time is to collect a number of those policies and create a comparison chart. Together, task force members can review those policies and decide what they would like to keep, what they would eliminate, and what they would add that is most relevant to their jurisdiction. It is also important to ensure that whatever policies are adopted are in compliance with applicable laws and state regulations. Remember, laws and regulations typically provide the "floor" of rights and protections provided to individuals, not the "ceiling." In many cases, compliance with best practices will provide more rights and protections than are required by law or regulations. Any policy that is adopted should include training requirements. The task force should discuss a training schedule and trainer qualifications.

In addition, it is important to discuss how decisions will be made with respect to policy recommendations. Will voting take place? Will a consensus model be



used? Majority rules? Ultimately, the probation department will have the final say since they must implement and enforce the policy. However, the other task force members should always make their opinions known: This is critical for passage of the most comprehensive policy possible that encompasses best practices.

## Learning About the Community

Prior to the first task force meeting, you should learn about the community where this policy will govern. Every community has its own unique history and ethos. While LGBTQ people exist in every US state (The Williams Institute, 2013), public acknowledgment and acceptance in their respective communities vary from place to place. The obvious topic to learn about in any community is the manner in which LGBTQ and GNC people are treated. However, the review of a community should expand beyond that. Communities are dynamic organisms, shifting and changing with, behind, or ahead of the times. How did this community come to be where it is today? What issues shaped it? Who settled this community and how? What did that process look like? How important has race and ethnicity been in this community? What do issues around gender look like? How has recent immigration impacted this community? Is it urban, rural, suburban, other? How have capitalism and industry shaped this community? Who are its power brokers? What are its successes and failures? Is it struggling today? If so, with what or whom? Seek out what justice was and is in this community. What are the important issues of the day?

Local literary and technological resources, such as books, research articles, newspaper articles, videos, etc., are helpful tools for learning about a community. In addition, human resources, such as the elders who have lived in the community and are living witnesses to the dynamics of its cultural and political metamorphoses, should be identified. These people may be government officials, running CBOs, doing volunteer work, working in corporations, local neighborhood organizers, or simply longtime

community members. Why is this important? It is essential to know how LGBTQ and GNC youth in the juvenile justice system fit in with the community—why it is important for the community to make the changes that the task force will recommend.

## Local and Federal Laws and Policies

Task force members should receive information regarding local and federal laws, as well as policies and regulations from various agencies that provide protections based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. Any laws, regulations, and policies that relate specifically to LGBTQ and GNC adults or youth involved with the criminal or juvenile justice system will be of particular interest. Additionally, county counsel or another attorney will review the policy for legal compliance before it is adopted.

## Relationship-Building With The Community

Another goal, if not the main goal, of the task force may be to build relationships with people and organizations in the community so that governmental agencies are aware of the available support services for LGBTQ and GNC youth and their families. This is a very important step. Many government agencies do not have sufficient knowledge of community resources, and many CBOs have not established relationships with government agencies, especially those in the juvenile justice field; therefore, they miss the opportunities to provide needed services. A number of probation departments and juvenile detention centers have “CBO fairs” to which they invite CBOs and other service providers to attend and educate the youth and the staff about the services they offer. Task force members should inquire about the dates and times for these fairs and request to attend. It also is advisable to develop an LGBTQ resource list for task force members to take back to their respective agencies and organizations.

# Challenges Within and Outside of the Task Force

Challenges are inevitable whenever you gather a group of government officials, CBO representatives, and community activists in a room and ask them to agree to a list of rules regarding government employee treatment of youth who are LGBTQ and GNC in detention or on probation in the community. Be prepared for the following possibilities.

## 1. People who do not care/are not interested.

It happens. Some people assigned to the task force will not want to be there for any number of reasons. Most people appointed will be supportive, but you will need to manage the few who are not. Sometimes this happens when line staff are not on the same page as upper management. Chances are this task force convened because probation department leadership agreed to do so. However, support from those in senior management positions does not transfer to support from line staff. One way to ease this concern is to ensure that line staff are included on the task force. Typically the chief/director of probation will appoint the agency staff who will serve on the task force, so emphasize to that person the importance of having representation from line staff who are respected by their peers and will help obtain buy-in from their colleagues. It is important to remember that while support from senior management is critical to initiating and moving the process forward, it is line staff who will have, on a daily basis, the bulk of responsibility in implementing and enforcing the changes the task force is seeking.

## 2. People who care but “cannot” prioritize the task force. What is preventing them from prioritizing the work? More often than not, people who are supportive are swamped

with their “regular” job duties and might be suffering from “initiative fatigue,” whereby they feel unable to commit time and energy to yet another project or are simply overwhelmed by adding another meeting to their schedule. It may be helpful to ask what they need to feel supported in attending task force meetings and explore whether or not their supervisor or agency can provide those supports.

## 3. Time, member retention, and loss of momentum.

It is easy to get caught up in the excitement of establishing and convening a task force. Members often are delighted to be part of something new that aims to achieve very admirable goals. This momentum can be felt especially during the first six months of the task force’s formation. But as realities set in regarding the amount of time and level of commitment required, other challenges may begin to arise, including disagreements around provisions in the policy or wording within the policy. Other concerns may include approval from leadership and buy-in from line staff. Consequently, meeting attendance may start to decline. This makes setting smaller benchmarks for the project that keep the momentum going an important strategy, even if those benchmarks are not always met. Additionally, assigning small tasks that members can complete prior to the subsequent meeting will create a sense of ownership and responsibility to the success of the task force. However, it is important to remember that task force members have full calendars; those assigning “homework” must be strategic, ensuring that the tasks are not overwhelming or time consuming. Whether or not tasks are assigned, check-ins with members



between meetings are crucial in order to gather feedback on how they think the process is going. Task force members need to know their input is valuable and that they have a direct line to the task force facilitator. Lastly, keeping in touch between meetings guarantees that members have all the information they need to show up prepared for the next meeting, such as date, time, place, and materials.

**4. Legal counsel.** If the goal of the task force is to adopt a policy and/or change current regulations, attorneys who work for the agency, city, county, state, etc., may need to be involved in this process. This should be determined early on. The facilitator also needs to know what to expect from attorneys. Attorneys can either help or hinder the process. Consequently, it is advisable that the task force facilitator, early in the process, speak with the chief/director about the politics around the legal counsel's office, challenges the task force might face, and how to overcome those challenges. For example, the role of most attorneys is to provide advice to their clients, in this case, the probation department. Clients decide how much of that advice to reject or accept. There is a difference

between clients who will do whatever the attorneys advise, without question, and clients who will question the attorneys and ask them how to implement the changes they think are important in a legally responsible way. The former allows the attorneys almost complete control, usually without the benefit of broader knowledge. The latter allows the client to inform the attorneys of what is important, making it clear to the attorneys that their role is to facilitate changes deemed as important by the task force.

**5. Unions.** Similar to legal counsel, local unions may be involved in this process. If so, you should have some idea of the role of the unions in your jurisdiction and how they will need to be engaged. Are they needed to approve of a change in policy or regulations? This should be considered in your timeline because obtaining union support can make the process longer.

**6. Youth participation.** It should go without saying that LGBTQ and GNC youth who have had juvenile justice system involvement should be invited to serve on the task force and be included in the process. Organizations that serve LGBTQ and GNC youth, whether or not they are represented on the task force, are a good place to start with respect to finding interested youth. However, it may be difficult to obtain consistent youth participation depending on a number of factors, including:

- a. The location of the meetings and whether or not the youth has transportation;
- b. The time and day and whether or not it conflicts with school or work;
- c. The youth's ability to speak up at a meeting consisting mostly of authority figures; and
- d. The amount of support the youth receives from family and friends to participate on the task force.



With respect to youth, (a) and (b) are logistical, and (c) and (d) may require more mindfulness. If paying for transportation is a problem, youth could receive stipends to cover their transportation; some youth-serving organizations may be able to cover those transportation expenses. Try to schedule the meetings at locations accessible via public transportation. The time may be trickier since business hours tend to overlap with some portion of the school day. Holding the meetings later in the day, after school hours, might work sometimes. It also may help to meet at different times of the day instead of having one set meeting time every month or every other month.

Some youth will have absolutely no problem expressing their views to anyone who asks. Others may feel intimidated, making it important to create a process that will invite them to participate. Remind them that their input is valuable and encourage them to speak up at the meetings. If they still do not speak up, encourage them to converse with the facilitator outside of the meetings. Again, youth who have developed relationships with the youth organizations represented on the task force may feel more support and be more likely to participate. If obtaining consistent youth participation is a problem, consider convening one or two focus groups of youth only. These youth should be paid for their time and transportation. Gift cards of \$50 to \$100 are typical payment, depending on the amount of time required.

Another way to reach out to youth and other interested community members is by hosting a community forum. A community forum provides an opportunity for community members to discuss their experiences with the juvenile justice system—either their own or those of their children or other youth. A forum can include a discussion on the policy and provide

an opportunity for community input. One of the CBOs on the task force may be the perfect entity to host such a forum given the extensive listserv that many CBOs have. The costs for such a forum can be split among task force members or can be fully funded by the facilitator of the task force. The goal for attendance should be discussed as well as the food/refreshments that will be provided (highly recommended, especially if the forum is held after school and after work on a weekday and is close to dinner time).

**7. People who will be impacted by the policy but are not on the task force.**

This was mentioned above, under #1, with respect to line staff but bears repeating here. This mainly refers to line staff and other juvenile justice stakeholders whose work will be governed by the policy. If they are not on the task force, they may actually not know that a policy is being implemented. They may hear about it from other task force members and, depending on what (mis)information is delivered to them, may feel as though they have no voice in the process; this could lead to them forming opposition to what they are learning.

**8. It is helpful to remember that everyone will not get exactly what they want.**

In addition, LGBTQ advocates in particular should resist the temptation to write off someone as “homophobic” or “transphobic” (or any other unflattering judgments) because they disagree with you. Reasonable minds do disagree. It happens, and it does not mean something is terribly wrong with the other person’s ideology, intelligence, or level of compassion. If an impasse is reached with people who have to implement and enforce the policy, i.e., the governmental agency, keep in mind their stated mission and values and try to tie those back to what you are asking them to do.

## Youth Participation on an LGBTQ Task Force

By Tamár Thomas and Gilbert Pizano

We were invited to join an LGBTQ task force at a large, urban probation department. Through our work on this task force, we learned that there were a lack of services and policies in place for LGBTQ youth within the probation department. Nothing was clear on how to address transgender youth, such as what they should wear, time spent in the shower, and medication being given if needed. We believe this task force was able to accomplish a few goals with changing the environment for the LGBTQ community so they can feel safer and feel like they have rights and equality. We believe this task force did very important work and we were able to see the support provided to the LGBTQ youth.

As youth advocates, our role on the task force was to provide the youth perspective to ensure the best possible outcomes for LGBTQ youth. At the meetings, we found it really hard to speak and feel comfortable. We both felt like the setup of the room for the meetings made it difficult to participate. The meetings were held in a large room where all the tables and chairs were spread far apart from each other. It was difficult to hear others speak. There was one meeting when we broke up into small circles of four to five people. This was helpful because we felt more at ease and more comfortable talking and giving our input and feedback. It felt less like the spotlight was on us. We also felt distant from the group because we did not start in the beginning of the task force. We joined the group late. It would have been helpful to meet with the chairperson before we attended our first task force meeting to get some background information and to find out what the group was currently working on. We also think that having a meeting with the chairperson, separate from the rest of the group, every so often would have been helpful. Sometimes sharing in a smaller group is easier. Another thing that made it hard to participate was that we felt intimidated. Sometimes the language was hard to understand. We recommend that the information be shared in youth-friendly language. We also suggest using different ways to deliver information to help people who have different learning styles understand and follow the conversation better.

There were several things we really liked about the meetings. We liked that the policy draft was made available to everyone to edit. This made it easy to give feedback. We also liked that there was food provided. Food helps people feel welcomed and gives an extra boost when you are tired. What also worked was at each meeting we did introductions and we were asked to share our preferred gender pronoun. We believe this helps people feel more comfortable, which allows them to participate more in the meetings.

# Policy Implementation

Implementation of the policy must be planned, as it will take time. Policies and standards must be put in place to ensure the safety and well-being of LGBTQ and GNC youth, but the *treatment* of LGBTQ and GNC youth will not improve until line staff change their behavior accordingly. Various models are available for training agency leadership and upper management as well as line staff. All staff (e.g., juvenile institutional officers, probation officers, clinicians) can receive training at once; however, in large facilities, small groups may be trained over the course of several days. For example, it is recommended that no more than 30 people be trained at a time, a manager or supervisor be present at each training, and the titles and positions are mixed (i.e., juvenile institutional officers and probation officers should train together so that each has an understanding of the others' responsibilities and they can discuss how to collaborate in order to best support the needs of the youth).

When possible, outside trainers should work with one or two agency supervisors or line staff in advance of

the training. This is so that agency representatives can personalize some of the training materials to their agency, which may add more credibility to the training for the rest of the staff. The representatives also serve as a reminder that the agency takes the policy and its implementation seriously. You can also choose a "training for trainers" model. This model requires leadership to identify groups of people from various departments or units in the department to be trained, generally by an outside trainer with subject-matter expertise. Then that group trains the rest of the agency staff. It is highly recommended that trainings be accompanied by post-training "coaching" or technical assistance (TA)—attitudes and behaviors are more likely to shift when training is followed by coaching over a period of several weeks or months. Typical coaching methods include phone calls, emails, webinars, and in-person meetings with staff to offer real-time assistance as they work through specific cases. Aside from training and coaching, a plan for ongoing education and future trainings (e.g., refresher courses, training for new staff) should also be developed.





# Conclusion



What happens to the task force after it reaches its goal will require discussion with the chief/director and other task force members. If the goal was to adopt a policy, and that was accomplished, the members may decide to dissolve the task force. Or, the group may decide to keep the task force going and transition into a coaching or technical assistance role. If the task force continues to exist for the purpose of TA, those members in a position to do so can provide trainings and other resources to both the probation department and to other agencies that provide services to LGBTQ and GNC youth and their families. If the task force morphs into a TA or other advisory role, it most likely

will not need to meet with the same frequency. Quarterly or biannual meetings might be best, with the option of consulting with the task force for special cases in between meetings.

Convening an LGBTQ task force in the juvenile justice system is, by no means, an easy endeavor. Collaborations are not perfect, but the ability of government systems, CBOs, and community members to come together to create reform is worthwhile. The potential benefits for youth and families are numerous and oftentimes immeasurable.

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