



# The PFLAG Chapter Manual

2010 Edition



*Moving equality forward through support, education and advocacy.*

# The PFLAG National Chapter Manual (2010 Edition)

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## Introduction

Welcome to the new edition of the PFLAG Chapter Manual! Whether you are a new chapter leader taking your first steps in making your chapter a great resource in your community, or if you are a seasoned PFLAG member who already knows the transformative power of our work, we hope that this guide will assist you in establishing, growing, and constantly strengthening the critical work that you are doing to move equality forward for our loved ones.

No matter how long (or new) your involvement with PFLAG is, you are part of a movement that began in 1972 when Jeanne Manford marched with her son in a pride parade carrying a sign that said “Parents of Gays Unite in Support for Our Children” This simple statement of love and support was the catalyst that inspired parents and led to the forming of PFLAG.

### PFLAG’s Structure

PFLAG has grown tremendously over the last 38 years. From Jeanne Manford marching in a pride parade, PFLAG has become a well-known and much-respected national organization serving chapters across the nation with a staff of approximately 16 people. Through the years, our strength has remained in our grassroots presence. Today we have over 350 **chapters**, which are defined as groups of two or more people who meet regularly. We also have many **representatives** in our family – individuals who serve as a support resource in their community, across the country continuing to spread PFLAG’s message in communities big and small. Our chapters are on the front lines of the battles and successes for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) equality in their communities.

Your chapter is sure to grow and evolve over the years and we have several structures and volunteers in PFLAG to help in that process. Here is a quick overview of how we help our members:

PFLAG National is governed by a **Board of Directors** consisting of 21 members. These members come from chapters, corporate America, and our Regional Directors Council and help guide PFLAG’s policies and strategies.

In addition to our Board of Directors, we also have the **Regional Directors Council**. We often refer to our Regional Directors (RDs) as our “super volunteers.” RDs are chapter members who act as volunteer coordinators for a set regional area (anywhere from 2-5 states). RDs have been involved in their chapter for many years and most have held one or more leadership positions within their chapter. They are a great

resource to the chapters in their regions because their background provides them with first-hand experiences about how to meet the challenges that chapters experience as they grow and change. They are great people to work with and to call on when you are in need. They also serve as the voice of chapters within the governing structure of PFLAG. The RDs hold quarterly meetings in conjunction with the National board meetings where they express concerns and/or needs from chapters and advise the National board on issues ranging from advocacy positions to internal policies. To find contact information for your Regional Director, go to [www.pflag.org/regionaldirectors](http://www.pflag.org/regionaldirectors).

### **PFLAG National Staff**

In Washington, D.C. at the PFLAG National Office and in several sites around the country, PFLAG has a talented and dedicated National staff that is available to help you. Our Field Coordinators each work with a region of the country, assisting chapters and creating resources. Your Field Coordinator is available to answer any questions that you have and provide guidance on how to make your chapter strong and effective. In addition to the Field Coordinators, there are other members of the PFLAG National Staff – ranging from Communications, to Equality Partnerships, to Development – who provide leadership and can be great resources to you. The best way to determine who you should work with, however, is to start with your Field Coordinator as your primary contact ([www.pflag.org/staff](http://www.pflag.org/staff)).

### **A Final Word about This Manual...**

This guide is meant to provide you with the tools you need to get your chapter started, to build your chapter, and to help to solve common chapter problems. There is a tremendous amount of important information in the Chapter Manual, and reading through this will hopefully answer many of your questions. The content in this guide comes from many sources – especially our chapters who have proven that the PFLAG voice can and does change people’s hearts, minds, and ultimately their communities.

But if you still have questions, know that there are many people ready to help. Your Regional Director or Field Coordinator can assist with any additional questions that you have. (You’ll find more information on how to reach people on page 6.)

If you are new to PFLAG, we would like to officially welcome you to the PFLAG family! And if you have been a member of the PFLAG family, thank you for the monumental work that you do. We look forward to working with you as you help to spread PFLAG’s mission of support, education, and advocacy.

## What PFLAG National Does For You

PFLAG is a true grassroots organization, so much so that the National Office was founded by the chapters in an effort to better serve our members. At the National Office, we do our best to provide resources that make our chapters strong and help them to serve their communities. In this section, we'll highlight some of the things that the PFLAG National Office does and the resources we have to help PFLAG chapters grow to be effective.

### National Field and Policy Staff

Our National Field staff is in place to provide assistance to our chapters. You may find a list of all National staff contact info at [www.pflag.org/staff](http://www.pflag.org/staff). There are three **Field Coordinators** that work with specific regions of the country (East, Central, and West) and are often the first point of contact for many PFLAG chapter questions. Our **Chapter Services Coordinator** assists new chapters in completing the chapter affiliation paperwork and handles paperwork and membership dues from chapters. Our **Safe Schools Coordinator** helps chapters engage their local schools in bullying and harassment prevention, and our **Policy Coordinator** assists chapters with advocacy on state and federal LGBT policy.

### Providing National Representation on Issues

PFLAG National works to ensure that the unique PFLAG voice is heard loud and clear in discussions about legislation that impacts the LGBT community and their families. The PFLAG National staff represents the PFLAG community and advocates on a number of issues of national importance. Our policy staff is a fixture on Capitol Hill where they lobby members of Congress and the President. PFLAG also works alongside many other organizations to bring about policy and cultural change. Visit the Advocacy and Issues section of the PFLAG National website ([www.pflag.org/advocacy](http://www.pflag.org/advocacy)) for the most current information and tools on federal LGBT policy.

### Bringing Training to Chapters

PFLAG National Staff in the Field and Policy, Communications, and Equality Partnerships departments offer training programs for PFLAG members at national, state, and regional conferences, through field visits, and by both conference call and webinar-based training to empower chapters in providing effective support, education and advocacy for their communities.

Some of our training programs cover topics such as:

- Membership Recruitment and Retention
- Strong Chapter Boards and Leadership Development

- Strategic Planning for Chapters
- Fundraising for Chapters
- Branding for Your Chapter
- Telling Your Story
- Transgender Issues
- Building Diverse Coalitions
- Outreach to Families of Color
- Safe Schools
- Straight for Equality (Introduction, Healthcare, and Faith versions available)
- Straight for Equality in Healthcare
- Effective Media Strategy
- Working with Faith Groups

Contact your Field Coordinator for more information on availability and how we can provide training that will meet your chapter's needs. Go to [www.pflag.org/staff](http://www.pflag.org/staff) for contact information.

### **Offering Media Assistance**

There are a number of ways that the PFLAG National Communications team can work with your Field Coordinator to assist your chapter when working with the media to amplify your message and develop an effective media strategy. You can access immediate resources on our website, including templates for press releases, media advisories, and PowerPoint presentations. We also have information on the best ways to work with the media and how to find local media. In addition, our Field and Communications staff can help you with any other media needs that you have. The Communications department at PFLAG National also works to make sure PFLAG's name and perspective are represented on national and local issues. We are often on the lookout for members to share their stories with national press. Check out the *Chapter Media Tools* section of the PFLAG National website ([www.pflag.org/chaptermediatools](http://www.pflag.org/chaptermediatools)) for practical media assistance for your chapter.

### **Safe Schools: PFLAG's Cultivating Respect Program**

One of PFLAG's cornerstone issues is making schools safe for our LGBT youth, and many chapters have made this effort their top programmatic priority. To help make our safe schools efforts effective, PFLAG National developed a comprehensive safe schools program for chapters called Cultivating Respect. The program is based on a train-the-trainer model where PFLAG National staff trains local chapter member to engage their local school communities on LGBT anti-bullying issues. Full-day safe schools trainings are available to PFLAG

members, and staff is available for on-on-one assistance beyond these trainings. In addition to this program, the Safe Schools staff and the Policy staff at PFLAG work at the federal level to pass inclusive and enumerated anti-bullying and harassment policies that protect all LGBT students. For more information on the safe schools program visit [www.pflag.org/safeschools](http://www.pflag.org/safeschools) and contact your Field Coordinator ([www.pflag.org/staff](http://www.pflag.org/staff)).

### **PFLAG National Scholarship Program**

Each year PFLAG National, provides scholarships to deserving LGBT and straight ally high school seniors who demonstrated a commitment to serving the LGBT community and moving equality forward. These inspirational students come from across the country and have a variety of stories. Applications are available each winter and are due in the spring. Applicants and winners of the National Scholarship program are also welcome to apply to the local chapter scholarships in their area. You can help ensure students in your community are applying for the PFLAG National scholarships by advertising it in your local schools, youth groups, and community centers. For more information on the National Scholarship Program ([www.pflag.org/scholarships](http://www.pflag.org/scholarships)) or to add your chapter's scholarship to the list of local PFLAG scholarships ([www.pflag.org/chapterscholarships](http://www.pflag.org/chapterscholarships)) on the PFLAG National website, contact our Safe Schools Coordinator ([www.pflag.org/staff](http://www.pflag.org/staff)).

### **Straight for Equality**

Straight people advocating for the rights of the LGBT community have always been the foundation of PFLAG. However, our focus for has been primarily on straight allies with a familial connection to the LGBT community (such as parents and family members.) PFLAG National has embarked on a program to engage straight allies who have no familial connection to the LGBT community but are committed to the fight for equality through the Straight for Equality program. It works to invite, educate, and engage allies (and especially *potential* allies) in non-political, everyday ways to transform culture. From learning how to stop a gay joke at work, to engaging your Bible study group in a discussion about LGBT people, to talking to your healthcare providers about why inclusive care is important, there are many ways Straight for Equality helps people create change. Visit [www.straightforequality.org](http://www.straightforequality.org) for more practical chapter-based information on working with allies in your community, schools, workplace, healthcare facilities, and faith communities. Contact your Field Coordinator if you would like to learn more about how your chapter can become more involved in this project.

### **PFLAG Publications**

PFLAG National produces a variety of publications and offers them to chapters at a discounted price. These publications address issues including family acceptance, coming out, transgender issues, safe schools, straight

allies, and faith, as well as general PFLAG information brochures. Our publications were designed with the needs of chapters in mind and are great tools on which many chapters rely to provide education to new parents and their communities. You can download free electronic copies of the publications as PDFs or purchase them in bulk on our website. We also publish a yearly lobbying guide, *Bringing the Message Home*, as a resource to chapters that are looking to get more involved in local and national advocacy issues. We continue to create publications to better serve our chapters, so regularly check in with your Field Coordinator and on the PFLAG website to keep up to date on what's new.

### **Online Resources**

The PFLAG National website ([www.pflag.org](http://www.pflag.org)) is the hub of PFLAG information and resources. Chapter members should take time to familiarize themselves with all of the great resources that are available there, including:

- Information about specific issues and policies that impact chapters
- Resources for working with the media
- Branding materials, including our logo (and usage guide) and templates for letterhead and PowerPoint presentations
- Free downloads of PFLAG's publications and newsletters
- Listings of national, state, and regional upcoming events and conferences
- The PFLAG National Blog, constantly being updated with local and national stories of interest
- The PFLAG Online Advocacy center where in less than five minutes you can send messages on critical advocacy issues to your elected officials
- A place to subscribe to PFLAG's great newsletters, action alerts, and press releases
- Free hosting of PFLAG chapter websites (get information on this by contacting your Field Coordinator)

By spending a few minutes on the PFLAG National website you can access unlimited information and resources that are constantly being updated, so make it part of your routine to check-in regularly.

### **The PFLAGall Listserv**

Please consider joining PFLAG's chapter leadership listserv – PFLAGall. PFLAGall is a forum where members can post information, questions and advice on all things PFLAG-related. Like chapter support circles, PFLAGall provides peer support. To join PFLAGall e-mail your Field Coordinator ([www.pflag.org/staff](http://www.pflag.org/staff)).

## **Sending Our Message Through Social Media**

PFLAG national also hosts PFLAG and a Straight for Equality Facebook pages. Join each of the pages to post information and articles about the LGBT community or for the ally community and check out the helpful features such as the discussions topics and the picture sharing. You can find them by searching for “PFLAG National” and “Straight for Equality” from your Facebook start page.

## **Hosting National, Regional, and State Conferences**

Every other year PFLAG National hosts a multi-day National Convention. The Convention provides a venue for chapter members to come together to learn new skills, be briefed on important issues, and get a chance to network. Many PFLAGers that have attended past conventions will tell you that the experience had an enormous impact on their chapter and the work of PFLAG in their community. PFLAG National also works closely with local chapters and Regional Directors to host state and regional conferences. State and regional conferences provide a convenient way for local groups to get together to help build skills and connect with each other. Contact your Field Coordinator ([www.pflag.org/staff](http://www.pflag.org/staff)) for a state/regional conference guide.

## **Building the PFLAG Brand**

The PFLAG logo is an important visual symbol of the organization and our chapters. Maintaining a consistent brand by using the proper logo in ways that are consistent with our usage guidelines is an important way to increase PFLAG’s visibility and recognition. The PFLAG logo is available for download in many formats from our website at [www.pflag.org/logo](http://www.pflag.org/logo). In that area of the website, you can see examples of how you can easily personalize it by adding your chapter name. PFLAG National maintains the copyright on the logo and the PFLAG name and monitors for copyright infringement.

## **But Wait, There’s More!**

This is just some of the work that PFLAG National does to better serve our chapters. In the upcoming chapters of this manual, you will find a number of other resources that available to you and ways that we can help strengthen your chapter.

PFLAG chapters are the heart and the power behind our organization, and the staff at PFLAG National takes our responsibility to the chapters to help them grow and thrive very seriously. Read on to learn more ways to achieve that goal.

## Chapter Leadership Structure

Having strong chapter leadership is the foundation for a strong PFLAG chapter. Strong leaders help chapters to accomplish their goals and serve their members. The most effective leadership structures in chapters allows for more than one person to share responsibilities and work together to run the chapter. It may seem easier for one person to take on all the work than worry about delegating tasks, but in the end chapters with active boards and members are able to accomplish more and are better able to attract new leaders and members.

### Leadership Roles and Responsibilities

At a minimum, all chapters are required to have a **president**, **secretary**, and **treasurer**. Having *at least* three leaders helps to ensure that one person isn't taking on too much and also provides checks and balances within the chapter. To further ensure checks and balances and financial health, these three leaders should not be related or live together. It is important that leaders understand the roles that they are taking on, so creating a list of responsibilities for each position is a good idea.

Here is an example of what these roles might look like:

#### **President:**

- Works with the treasurer to develop a budget
- Presides over board and membership meetings
- Represents PFLAG in the community
- Works as a liaison to the Regional Director and Field Coordinator
- Performs other duties related to the overall leadership and maintenance of the chapter

#### **Secretary:**

- In charge of maintaining minutes from board meetings and the annual meeting
- Works with the chapter president and treasurer to maintain chapter records
- Sends out notices and reminders to members about upcoming meetings and events

#### **Treasurer:**

- Oversees the chapter budget
- Maintains financial records and receipts
- Manages the distribution of funds
- Provides a detailed financial report at each board meeting and a summary at membership meetings
- Completes necessary financial paperwork

It is perfectly acceptable for chapters to mix and match the duties of the chapter leadership. Some chapters' boards brainstorm to determine what tasks need to be accomplished and then divide those responsibilities up. What's important is that the roles are clearly defined and that the leadership knows what is expected of them.

There is also no limit to the number of board members and leadership positions that a chapter can have. Creating new leadership positions is a great way to share the workload and get more people engaged in the work of the chapter. Other positions that chapters have added include: safe schools chair, membership chair, support group facilitator, fundraising chair, newsletter editor, advocacy chair, faith director, diversity chair, new member chair, communications chair, speaker's bureau chair, etc. The possibilities are endless! Tapping into the talents, abilities, and interests of your members will help them find projects that make your chapter thrive.

### **Chapter Board Best Practices**

With all that chapter leaders and boards do, the job can at times seem overwhelming. By keeping a few key things in mind and adopting these best practices, chapters can help ensure that they are better serving their members and preparing the chapter for the future.

- **Hold monthly board meetings.** It is important for board members to meet to plan and discuss upcoming issues.
- **Practice transparency.** Board members should share reports at monthly chapter meetings to let members know what they are working on. Many chapters provide a report on board activities and chapter finances in their newsletters. It is also important to let members know that your board meetings are open to any member who would like to attend. Send out a meeting agenda as an invitation.
- **Hold an annual meeting and elections.** All chapters should have an annual meeting where they re-examine the past year and what they have accomplished. It's a good time for chapters to have annual elections.
- **Do strategic planning.** Chapters benefit from taking time each year to set goals and plan for the year ahead. There is so much that chapters want to accomplish that it can be overwhelming. Selecting 2-3 specific goals for the year to come will help the chapter accomplish what they set out to do.
- **Cultivate leadership.** In addition to holding annual elections, chapter leaders should constantly be looking for new people in the chapter that might be interested in getting more involved and providing opportunities for them to move into leadership roles. One rule to consider is for each board member is required to cultivate a member to take over their position when their term expires.

- **Develop a Board code of conduct.** It is important that chapter leaders understand what is expected of them as leaders as well as how they are expected to represent your chapter and PFLAG. It is a good idea to have each member of your board sign a Code of Conduct agreement so that expectations are clear. For a sample Code of Conduct agreement, contact your Regional Director or Field Coordinator.
- **Do annual membership drives.** Collecting membership donations from members once a year is a board function. Fifteen dollars of those memberships is owed to the National Office for each household member, but you may set your chapter memberships at any price you choose. Most chapters ask for between \$30 and \$50 per household member.

These best practices will not only make the chapter operate smoothly, it will provide a way for your membership to be more involved in the chapter.

### **Financial Checks, Balances, and Requirements**

All chapter leaders should be interested in the financial well-being of the chapter and should share in the responsibility of making sure that the chapter is financially sound. By putting a few easy practices in place, chapters should be able to ensure that they are being fiscally responsible. Some important best practices include:

- Require two non-related check signers for your bank account.
- Have the president and secretary review the monthly bank statement with treasurer.
- All leadership should work together to establish and follow the annual chapter budget.
- All expenses should be approved in advance.
- The chapter should have a chapter specific bank account. **You should never have chapter money in a personal bank account.**

### **Annual Filing Duties**

Also, all chapter leaders should be aware of the annual financial filing requirements that all chapters must meet.

- **Complete and submit your financial report to PFLAG National.** Each year the IRS requires PFLAG National to file our taxes, which includes reporting out on the financial situation of our chapters. This means chapters must fill out and return a Chapter Financial Statement to PFLAG National by December 31<sup>st</sup>. Look for the Chapter Financial Statement form from our Chapter Services Coordinator in November of each year.

- **File the e-postcard online with the IRS.** All chapters that have income *less than* \$25,000 must fill out a simple IRS electronic postcard. Each year, the Chapter Services Coordinator will remind you when it is time to fill out the e-postcard and is happy to answer questions. Any chapter whose income, on average, is *more than* \$25,000 (over a three-year period) is required to complete Form 990 with the IRS. Don't panic! This doesn't apply to many chapters, and for those for whom this is a requirement, we can provide assistance.

Following these two simple steps will help keep chapters in good financial standing with PFLAG National and will help them maintain your important 501(c)3 non-profit status.

## Chapter Meetings

Most PFLAG chapters meet monthly to provide support, education, and advocacy to their members. While many people attend special events that PFLAG chapters have, the heart and soul of PFLAG is at the monthly meeting. The ability to meet and share personal stories with others is a comfort to many and the opportunity to learn allows PFLAGers to continue to grow.

### Where Do You Meet?

PFLAG chapters meet in all kinds of places. Consider all types of locations when you choose your meeting space. Libraries, community centers, and churches or synagogues often have meeting rooms for little or no cost.

For many PFLAG chapters, meeting in a church is sometimes the only free and safe option. However, people with a different faith tradition, no faith tradition, or those who have felt abandoned by their faith tradition can feel intimidated or unwelcome in certain faith settings. If your chapter meets in a church, look around your meeting space — what do the pictures and images depict? If it's a Christian church, think about ways to make it safe for people who are not Christian. If you are meeting in a faith-affiliated location, it may be helpful to mention in your advertising that you are not directly affiliated with any religious group.

Here are a few items to think about when determining where your chapter will meet:

- **Public spaces:** It is absolutely necessary that you meet in a public location. PFLAG chapters are open to the public and your meeting space needs to reflect that. **You should not meet in someone's home.**
- **LGBT-Specific Spaces:** Be aware that while often easy to arrange, LGBT-specific spaces like community centers or service providers can create barriers for struggling parents or closeted LGBT people to attend. **While it is okay to hold events, fundraisers and social times in LGBT bars, you should not hold a support meeting or general membership meeting in a bar.**
- **Clear Locations:** Try to meet somewhere that is easy to find. In any community, urban, suburban or rural, try to avoid an obscure location on the edge of town or a place that requires multiple, difficult directions to get there.
- **Public Transportation:** Is your chapter meeting accessible by public transportation? If someone calls who doesn't have a car, do you have directions readily available for public transportation?

- **Accessible Space:** How can people with disabilities get into your meeting space? At your next chapter meeting, find out how you would get to the meeting room if you were a person with a disability and plan accordingly.
- **Signage:** Post PFLAG meeting signs on the outside door of your meeting location and inside directing people to your meeting room.

### **Sample Timeline of PFLAG Meeting**

PFLAG meetings, like PFLAG chapters, come in all shapes and sizes. There is no one set schedule that chapters must follow, but this is a suggestion that is taken from some of our successful chapters.

- 7:00-7:05 — Announcements and ground rules
- 7:05-8:00 — Support group(s) (break into smaller groups if you have more than 10 people)
- 8:00-8:10 — Break and social time
- 8:10-9:00 — Educational or advocacy program

Whatever schedule you select for your chapter, keep it consistent and advertise the components so that people who do not need support may come to just the program section of the meeting or people who are still struggling may leave after the support circle.

### **Support Group Facilitators**

Many people come to PFLAG – at least at first – for support and the person who facilitates the support circle will have a big impact on their experience. PFLAG’s tradition of peer-based support provides the space to connect with other people that have been through similar experiences.

Facilitators need not be trained counseling professionals, but should be caring members of your chapter that are good listeners and can be objective when hearing people’s stories. The role of the facilitator in PFLAG groups is not to provide advice, but to help keep the conversation going and make sure that everyone has the chance to share. It is a good idea to train a few facilitators so that there’s always a backup. Check out the support section for more information on facilitating a peer support group meeting.

## Welcoming First-Time Attendees

The experience that people have the first few times they attend your chapter meeting will influence whether or not they keep coming back. Here are some simple suggestions of ways to make new attendees feel welcome:

- **Have a greeter.** Designate a friendly member of your chapter to be present by the door and welcome people as they come in. This will also let people know that they are in the right place.
- **Use the buddy system.** Have board members or chapter regulars “buddy up” with new people as they walk in. The new buddies can introduce themselves, answer any questions that people have about the meeting, and offer them materials about the chapter or from your resource collection.
- **Create a first-time attendee folder.** Make up folders that contain a welcome letter, a copy of your chapter brochure, flyers about upcoming events, and any other important materials that your chapter has. This gives new attendees something to take home with them and more information about the chapter. It also looks very professional!
- **Follow up.** Ask for contact information and find out if it is ok for one of the leaders to be in touch. Call or e-mail the attendee after a week and ask how they are doing, if they have any other questions, and how they liked the meeting. Call or e-mail them again a week before the next meeting to remind them of the upcoming meeting.

Once you’re in the habit of doing these things, it will become second nature. As many of you remember, attending your first PFLAG meeting can be intimidating. Finding ways to engage new attendees and make them feel welcome will make the process smoother for them and encourage them to become involved in the chapter. Following these suggestions and best practices also will make your chapter inviting, informative, and engaging for both new attendees and regular chapter members.

## Programming

While many people may first come to PFLAG for support, it is the education and advocacy opportunities that keep people coming back and fulfilling our mission. Providing monthly opportunities for education or advocacy will keep the people that are no longer interested or in need of support coming to your meetings. Planning programming for your meetings doesn’t have to be hard or take a lot of time. Here are three great program formats to use at your meetings:

- **Movie and discussion:** There are lots of great films out there that make for great chapter programs. Check with your Field Coordinator for a list of appropriate movies to show.

- **Educational speakers:** Invite someone from your local or statewide LGBT advocacy group, community center, health organization, or one of the local allied organizations to speak to your chapter. You can also invite someone in your chapter or community that has a lot of knowledge about a subject to talk about it.
- **Current events discussions:** Bring copies of a recent local or national news story on LGBT issues to the meeting and lead a discussion around the topic. Try to connect the discussion to how you can influence the trend. For example, if the article is about Don't Ask, Don't Tell, be sure to tie the talk to what PFLAG does around this issue and how people can become more engaged in creating change through, for example, doing online advocacy or in-person lobby visits.

Some chapters have educational programs at every other meeting or at times other than the regular monthly meeting to add variety. Any programming you do will benefit the longevity of your chapter and make for strong meetings. Check the PFLAG website for more program ideas and talk to your Field Coordinator for more help.

### **Lending Library**

Many chapters have created libraries that chapter members can borrow from to increase their knowledge of the LGBT community and LGBT issues that are available at their monthly meetings. Chapters purchase or receive donated books that would be of interest to parents and LGBT people that attend their meetings. DVDs are great to have available in the library for chapter members looking for more resources. Free brochures and publications from local and national groups can be included for members to look through. The materials in your library will provide resources and information to your members and an opportunity to educate themselves about LGBT issues.

### **One Last Note**

To create a strong chapter, provide enough training for your members in how to effectively offer support to people who are new to PFLAG meetings. Be sure to read the chapter on how to do this starting on page 20.

## Providing Support

Starting with that first support group meeting that Jeanne Manford held in 1972, support has always been one of the primary (and most well-known) services that PFLAG provides. Support is a vital component our three-part mission (Support, Education, and Advocacy) and chapters are often the first to provide help in the coming out process for families and LGBT people themselves.

People that come to PFLAG are in different stages of acceptance, and peer support provides them with the network and resources that they need to move forward. While some people are still struggling with the news that their loved one is LGBT, we find that many of the parents coming to PFLAG are accepting of their children, but are looking for more information and want to connect with other parents. Meanwhile, we find that PFLAG chapters are supporting LGBT people of all ages – from pre-teens to seniors – who find themselves in a wide variety of points in their coming out process.

The support element of PFLAG is an important service that chapters provide for their community. Your personal story can provide so much reassurance and education to a parent with an LGBT child or an LGBT person struggling to come out. Remember – even a parent whose adult child has been out for 30 years, or an LGBT person who has been out and advocating for a decade can learn something from the stories and questions that are shared in a peer support circle.

Because support is so primary for chapters, being sure that your leadership understands how to offer effective support services is critical. In this chapter, you'll find the basics that you'll need to get people started.

### **Before You Begin: Confidentiality and Ground Rules**

PFLAG support meetings are a confidential and safe place for people to share their stories and find the help that they need. To create an environment where people feel like they can share and speak openly, your facilitator needs to set the tone. Someone should read a statement of confidentiality and provide some ground rules at the beginning of every support circle, and, in one-on-one support consultations, remind people that conversations are confidential. For people new to PFLAG, this promise of confidentiality provides a level of comfort, and for those who are seasoned PFLAGers, it offers a reminder about their responsibilities.

When holding support circles, many chapters use a simple statement like this:

*“All things said at this PFLAG support meeting are confidential. Nothing said in this room will leave this room, nor will people be pressed to share more information than they are comfortable with here or after the meeting.”*

Other chapters have added further guidelines, including:

- We each speak from our own experiences, and respect the experiences of others.
- We are considerate of the group and do not have side discussions.
- We provide support by listening carefully, sharing our own stories, and relating our own problem solving experiences. We are sensitive to each person's stage in the acceptance process.

Ultimately, it is up to your chapter to decide what guidelines fit your group best. Some chapters have asked members for suggestions of what should be included in the guidelines to make it a collective decision.

However you shape your guidelines, reassuring members that the meeting is confidential will help to make people feel more at ease.

### **Support Circle Structure**

The traditional way to provide peer support in the context of your PFLAG meeting is through a support circle. Set your room up in advance with chairs in a circle. Ask members and visitors to sit in the circle as the support meeting begins, and be sure to explain how the circle works and read a confidentiality statement.

Each person will share what he or she is comfortable talking about, whether it is why they are there, an issue they are dealing with, or even something positive about their loved one. (If you have a group that is reluctant to share, sometimes suggesting a specific topic for discussion will break the ice.)

Here are a few other tips and suggestions for an effective support circle:

- Be sure to allow people to pass or not speak. No one is required to share, and this should be clear to participants when you start.
- If your group is larger (10 people or more), consider breaking into smaller circles so that people have time to share.
- Set a time limit to the support circle. An hour to 90 minutes is plenty of time for sharing stories in a meeting. Setting a time limit – and sticking to it – helps manage people who monopolize the discussion.
- Compile a resource directory of organizations including LGBT/human rights/allied organizations, LGBT restaurants and clubs, crisis hotlines, HIV/AIDS service organizations, youth service providers, multi-lingual service organizations, religious organizations, healthcare services, etc. to refer people to when they have questions or specific needs and be familiar with the organizations and agencies listed so you can assist with questions.

## Support Facilitators

Facilitators play a key role in PFLAG chapters. Facilitators help set the pace and the atmosphere of the group and help keep things on course.

While there are no specific professional skills required to be a PFLAG support group facilitator – such as being a trained counselor or psychologist (and, in fact, we recommend against having people who do this professionally) – it is important that people who facilitate support services understand the role they play and responsibilities that they have. Facilitators help communicate PFLAG’s unique brand of peer support by highlighting the personal stories and individual experiences that change hearts and minds.

The best facilitators are good listeners and have had experience participating in the support group. With so many stories to share, it is important for the facilitator to make sure that the conversation keeps moving and that people who want to speak are offered the opportunity.

Facilitators are also responsible for helping to bring the conversation to a close. While it may be tempting to talk longer, many chapters have found that setting a time creates needed structure and keeps members coming back.

Effective facilitators should be very familiar with the following items:

- PFLAG’s mission, including its support, education, and advocacy roles.
- The needs and concerns of different groups of people, including youth, bisexuals, transgender people, straight spouses, people of color, people with disabilities, etc.
- How to respond without judgment, especially when questions or comments indicate opinions different than the ones that the facilitator holds.
- The limits of PFLAG support. We do not provide professional therapy or counseling. Be ready with information on local counselors, a crisis hotline, or professional therapists for those who need more comprehensive help.
- How to recognize expressions of suicidal thoughts, and how to immediately direct people who are having these thoughts to the appropriate resources.

Some chapters provide facilitator training for members who are interested in this role. Contact your Field Coordinator for assistance with creating effective facilitator trainings.

## Communicating Effectively: Making Sure People Know Who You Are

A good communications strategy that enables your chapter to be visible in your community makes a huge difference in the effectiveness of the support we can provide to those who need PFLAG most.

Think back to the first time you looked for your PFLAG chapter. What was your first impression of PFLAG? Did you call, e-mail, or look up information about your chapter on the Internet? Now, think about someone looking for your chapter today. Who will answer when they call? What will they see when they visit your website? When they visit your chapter, how will they be greeted? Will they be able to find the meeting room?

The way people find out about PFLAG, the work we do, and how they reach a chapter has evolved over time, but the need to have easy access to information has remained consistent. When someone is looking for PFLAG, easy access and quick responses are an important factor in providing support, education, and advocacy to your community. The more difficult it is to find your chapter, the less likely it is that the person will receive the support they're looking for or attend a chapter meeting.

Having an effective communications strategy – even a very basic one – will help your chapter grow and thrive and fulfill your mission. In this section, we will show you some techniques that will help you communicate with your current members and reach out to potential new members.

### How does someone find your chapter?

#### Advertising

- **Be visible.** Advertising your PFLAG chapter meeting doesn't need to be expensive in order to be successful. Use all types of advertising and continue to always look for new ways to advertise. You can announce programs and events on community bulletin boards, in local newspaper community calendars, in other local newsletters like the PTA or the neighborhood association, etc. And don't forget that the Internet remains one of the first stops for most people today. Whether you're promoting yourself through your own website, or on Facebook ([www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)) having a strong online presence is critical. (See "Chapter Website" below for more information.)
- **Be accessible to new audiences.** If you only advertise in your local LGBT magazine or LGBT community center, it is likely that you will not attract new parents or allies who may still be nervous about even contacting an LGBT group. PFLAG is the gateway for parents, family members, and allies to learn about the needs of LGBT community, to become active as an ally, and/or to talk to others about the coming out process. It's very likely that they will not be familiar with the local LGBT magazines, organizations

or community centers and they won't go there to find PFLAG. People learn about the LGBT community in PFLAG first, and we need to advertise meetings as if the person your advertising is aimed at knows nothing about PFLAG or the LGBT community.

- **Be specific.** Publicize the details of your chapter meeting each month instead of something generic like “our chapter meets on the first Monday of each month”. The more detail you can provide about your services, program, format and goals, the better.
- **Put someone in charge.** Ask someone to volunteer to keep track of different places to advertise and coordinate each chapter announcement.
- **Refine your strategy.** Find out from new members and people who come to your meetings how they heard about your chapter. If you know what is working (and what isn't) then you'll be able to constantly improve your communications strategy.

### **Chapter Websites and Social Networking Sites**

Websites and social networking sites can be easy to use, inexpensive, and effective for people who are looking for information about your chapter.

Not sure that you're up for designing a website from scratch? PFLAG National offers our chapters a free, user-friendly website that you can customize with your information, events, photos, and more. Contact the Chapter Services Coordinator ([www.pflag.org/staff](http://www.pflag.org/staff)) for a guide to using PFLAG National's website service.

- **Use social network sites.** Other forms of online communication known as social network sites such as Facebook ([www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)), MySpace ([www.myspace.com](http://www.myspace.com)), Twitter ([www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com)) and blogs – are also great ways to communicate with members, supporters, and other interested parties. Chapters are taking advantage of these social networking tools to help build a base of supporters of all ages, recruit volunteers for projects, invite people to events and meetings, spread the word about PFLAG news, follow other chapters to see how they educate and provide support in their community, host discussions on LGBT issues, and support other LGBT/LGBT-friendly organizations.
- **Keep it simple and current.** Regardless of what online tools you use, ensuring that your information is clear and current is critical for success. When you look at your website, how easy is it to find contact information, meeting dates, and the meeting location? If you can't find it in three clicks, you can assume a new person is going to have a hard time finding this information. Keeping information current (if your homepage is still promoting your November 2008 chapter meeting in December 2010,

there's a problem) is also critical. If people get a sense that you're not paying attention, they won't, either.

## **Phone**

There are many people who will choose to make their first contact with a chapter via your helpline, so ensure that the right (and reliable) number is out there. Your chapter phone number is available to the public through the PFLAG National website so make sure that we've got the right number for you! Also be sure that your chapter website, brochures, flyers, and/or referral services all have the most current phone contact.

There are many options for maintaining your chapter helpline and phone number. Some options include:

- **Cell phones:** Recently, this has become a popular choice among chapters. A pay-as-you-go phone can be relatively inexpensive, as can a monthly service plan. Volunteers can take shifts with the phone because it's easy to pass around.
- **Home phones:** Some chapters use a chapter member's home phone as the chapter helpline. This option is easy and usually inexpensive. Some chapters add an additional phone line to someone's home as a more permanent option. However, using a home phone number, even with an additional line, limits who can answer the phone calls.
- **Voicemail services:** These services allow messages to be received and retrieved at a later date, but a caller will not directly access a volunteer, and they can be used with both home lines and cell phones. In comparison to using a home telephone where just one volunteer can monitor the helpline, several volunteers can access the system by using confidential access codes and return calls at their convenience. If you choose this kind of system, you must be hyper-vigilant about checking the voicemail and returning calls promptly. Keep in mind that new callers may feel reluctant to leave return information on a voicemail system if they have concerns about confidentiality at home or at work.

## **E-mail**

Every chapter should have a support or contact e-mail address. Avoid using a personal e-mail address because access to the e-mail should be available to key members of your chapter and portable over time, and that is difficult with a personal address. Use a provider like Gmail or Yahoo (which offer free services) to set up a general e-mail account with a clear and easy-to-remember address like [PFLAGpleasantville@gmail.com](mailto:PFLAGpleasantville@gmail.com). Be sure to advertise your e-mail address far and wide!

## Being Responsive to Communications

The most important thing to remember about the phone and e-mail services your chapter provides is that someone needs to be available to respond at all times. Imagine you are a parent in crisis or a youth struggling to come out and you finally get up the nerve to call or e-mail PFLAG...and no one responds. Think about the message that sends.

Being responsive to those who contact your chapter helps fulfill one of the key components of our mission – support! So keep the following things in mind for your phone and e-mail services:

- **Schedules:** Coordinate a schedule for who answers the phone and responds to e-mail. Make sure to pay special attention to holiday periods as many people come out to their families during these times.
- **Logs:** Keep a call-log with brief notes on the nature of each call and the follow-up needed. Keep all the information confidential.
- **Training:** Make sure the volunteers answering the calls and e-mails have some training. People are more willing to volunteer for projects when they feel trained and prepared and a prepared volunteer will serve your callers better. Check out the support section on page 20 for more information on how to do this successfully.

## Chapter Newsletter

Chapters create newsletters to communicate chapter information, community information and LGBT news with members and supporters. You can create a newsletter easily with Microsoft Word, Microsoft Publisher or similar programs.

There's a lot of important information that can be included in your newsletter. There are some basics like information about where and when your support meetings are held (and directions to get there), a summary of the previous meeting, the contact information for chapter board members, a report from the chapter leader, a treasurer's report, open volunteer positions, and the PFLAG mission statement. But including other features such as stories from members, book reviews, information about upcoming community events, information on open and affirming churches, national LGBT news, or LGBT history can be features that keep people reading your newsletter and passing it along to others to learn more about the work that you're doing.

Here are a few other things to consider when it comes to your newsletter:

- **Frequency:** How often should you send your chapter newsletter? Monthly, bi-monthly, or quarterly are good time frames to follow — choose the one that works best for your chapter. If you create a monthly newsletter, you can advertise for your chapter meeting by sending it out a week before the meeting.
- **Delivery:** More chapters are going paperless than ever before to save money and resources. It's easy to keep a list of e-mail addresses and send the newsletter out electronically as a PDF. Another option to consider is online e-mail marketing services like Constant Contact ([www.constantcontact.com](http://www.constantcontact.com)). Costs for these kinds of services are low — usually starting at around \$15 per month. These services allow you to customize the look of your newsletter with the PFLAG logo and colors, choose the layout that you like, manage your e-mail list, send unlimited messages per month, and track the results to see how many people are reading what you send and which links they are clicking.
- **Privacy:** Be sure to address and respect the privacy concerns of members. If you are mailing your newsletter, be sure that people are clear on what they will receive. Do you put your newsletter in an envelope with no logo on the outside? Do you have a logo and information visible to people who pick it up? These are concerns for some people. Make sure that they understand what they will receive.
- **Build your list.** Don't forget to ask people to sign up to receive the newsletter! Pass around a newsletter sign-up sheet at meetings and chapter events.

### Chapter Brochures

By creating a chapter brochure, you can provide valuable information about your chapter that can be easily distributed. You can include information about ongoing chapter programs, chapter meetings, and personal stories from parents, family members, allies, or LGBT people who have benefitted from getting involved with your PFLAG chapter. Contact your Field Coordinator ([www.pflag.org/staff](http://www.pflag.org/staff)) for ideas of how to create a chapter brochure and examples of successful brochures.

### Chapter Business Cards

Business cards are easy to carry in a wallet or purse, they are inexpensive to purchase, easy to pass out or leave in inconspicuous places and they contain vital chapter information.

Think outside the box when it comes to ways to use these cards! Anytime you attend an event where you'll meet new people you have an opportunity to hand them your card. If your chapter has a speaker's bureau, you can easily pass around a business card to the people in the audience. If you table at a conference or a festival, you can put a stack of business cards on the table for people to pick up. You can involve chapter

members by giving them a stack of cards to pass out when they meet someone who needs support or who's interested in attending a PFLAG meeting.

- **Details to include:** Use the correct PFLAG logo (you can download this from [www.pflag.org/logo](http://www.pflag.org/logo)), your chapter name, and contact information (including the chapter phone number, e-mail, and website).
- **Other ideas:** Include your mailing address, meeting location, and meeting dates. Don't forget that many printing services allow you to print on both the front and the back of the card, so take advantage of the space available!
- **Getting it printed:** Some chapter members opt to print their cards at home using Microsoft Word and an Avery business card template. However, many use online printing services like VistaPrint ([www.vistaprint.com](http://www.vistaprint.com)) to inexpensively print their cards and save some ink at home.

### The PFLAG Logo

Anytime you create PFLAG materials for your communications efforts, it is your responsibility to follow the guidelines for using the PFLAG logo. Go to [www.pflag.org/logo](http://www.pflag.org/logo) and download the logo for your chapter materials. These are the guidelines to follow:

- The PFLAG logo is not to be modified or altered in any way. Do not attempt to create or duplicate these logos. Use only the digital art provided on the PFLAG website ([www.pflag.org](http://www.pflag.org)).
- You may add your chapter name to the area below or alongside the logo as long as it does not alter the design of the actual logo art. [Some examples are available online.](#)
- You may resize the logo, but keep the height and width proportions the same.
- You may not add other graphic elements around or behind the logo that compromise visibility.
- You must use the official PFLAG colors when reproducing the logo. [Further information is available online.](#)

If you have additional questions about how to use the logo or need help with personalization, contact your Field Coordinator for assistance.

## Education and Advocacy

As it grows and becomes stronger, your PFLAG chapter can do a great job at providing a safe place for parents whose child has recently come out. Fulfilling the “support” part of our mission is certainly a crucial role for the chapter to play. However, it is only one component of the PFLAG mission of support, education, and advocacy.

Why is it important for your chapter to engage in education and advocacy? To put it simply, so that change can occur. How will we get lawmakers to vote for pro-LGBT bills if they are not aware of and educated about our issues? And how will lawmakers know how their constituents feel if we don’t make our voices heard? They won’t. So it is up to us to educate our members and ourselves. We have the knowledge and power necessary to help advance equality.

Now, you may be saying to yourself, “Advocacy makes me nervous. I’m not the type of person to march in Washington or protest at City Hall.” That’s ok. Advocacy and education come in many forms. Some actions are as simple as asking your members to respond to a PFLAG action alert. Here are some suggestions and best practices to get started on education and advocacy work in your chapter.

### Learn About the Issues

Before you can ask your elected officials to vote a certain way on a bill, you must first learn about the issue yourself. PFLAG National’s guide called *Bringing the Message Home* was created for just this purpose. It is a one-stop shop for the current legislative issues that we face. You can download this PFLAG-friendly guide by going to [www.pflag.org/bringingthemessagehome](http://www.pflag.org/bringingthemessagehome). This annual publication will offer you background on why we support certain issues, how you can talk about them, what you can say, and the steps you can take to feel (and look) confident when talking to legislators.

Once you firmly understand the ins and outs of a certain issue or bill, you will be able to talk to others about it. And talking your chapter members and community is the first step in working towards change.

### Make Your Voice Heard

Once you’re armed with the necessary education, the next step is to take action. Actions can be as simple as sending e-mail messages and making phone calls, to connecting with your local and statewide equality groups, or even conducting your own lobby visits. Here are a few steps to start out with small but powerful actions and work up to some larger activities:

- **Learn who your legislators are.** Who should you be talking to? Find out with just a few simple clicks through PFLAG’s website. Visit [www.capwiz.com/pflag/dbq/officials/](http://www.capwiz.com/pflag/dbq/officials/) and enter in your zip code.
- **Let your leaders know you’re here!** By signing up for PFLAG’s Action Alerts, you can send e-mail, letters, and make calls in just a few minutes with the resources that we provide. Action Alerts will let you know when it’s time for your voice to be heard. Sign up to receive PFLAG Action Alerts by visiting <http://capwiz.com/pflag>.
- **Connect with others:** Many PFLAG chapters work closely with statewide LGBT equality groups. These groups can all be located through their umbrella organization, The Equality Federation. You can find your state’s LGBT equality group by visiting [www.equalityfederation.org](http://www.equalityfederation.org).

### **Chapter Advocacy Activities: Getting Started**

Many chapters build advocacy activities into their meetings. Consider linking your activity to your educational program – for example, have a lawyer or local activist come talk about employment discrimination and then set up a table for people write letters to their lawmakers in support of employment discrimination laws like the Employment Nondiscrimination Act (ENDA).

Other programmatic activities chapters have successfully used include:

- **Phone banking:** Encourage members to use their free after-hours cell phone minutes to call their senators and representatives and leave messages in support of LGBT equality legislation. Make sure you provide the phone number and a simple phone script with some talking points about the particular issue you’re calling about.
- **Letter writing:** Provide members with sample letters and encourage everyone to write one of their own letters to their lawmakers before they leave the meeting. Be sure to collect all the letters at the end of the evening and send them in!
- **Collecting stories:** If there is an issue of particular importance in your community, collect stories from your members about how a certain law (or lack of law) affects them and their family, compile those stories and deliver them to lawmakers.

### **Important Information: 501(c)3 Rules and Regulations**

Remember, PFLAG National and PFLAG chapters who have completed the new chapter paperwork are considered 501(c)3 organizations. This means that we are a considered to be nonprofit, tax-exempt

organization by the IRS. 501(c)3 is a federal tax code that allows the filer(s) (in this case, PFLAG National and our chapters) to file as a tax exempt organization and collect tax-deductible donations.<sup>1</sup>

This 501(c)3 status imposes some very strict federal guidelines in regard to lobbying, and it is critical to know some basic do's and don'ts associated with this status. Violations of these rules can and often does result in loss of 501(c)3 status.

The most important, basic guideline to remember in respecting these rules is this: focus on *issues*, not *candidates*. In other words, your chapter may advocate for or against a bill, law, or on a particular issue, but **cannot** endorse or oppose a candidate (of any kind) or political party.

Here are some examples:

- **DO** support or lobby for the passage of a specific bill (i.e., “Please pass this Safe Schools legislation.”)
- **DO NOT** support or lobby for a particular political party (i.e., “PFLAG supports Jane Smith as a candidate for mayor in Springfield.”)
- **DO NOT** support or lobby for or against a particular candidate running for Congress, Senate, President, etc.
  
- **DO** invite everyone running for local or state office to come speak to your chapter
- **DO NOT** invite just one candidate or just one party to come speak to your chapter
  
- **DO** conduct non-partisan public education campaigns
- **DO** conduct non-partisan voter registration and get out the vote drives
- **DO** work with all political parties to get policy positions included on the party’s platform
  
- **DO NOT** make any campaign contributions
  
- **DO NOT** ask candidates to sign pledges on any issue

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<sup>1</sup> All chapters must be a 501(c)3 either by keeping their paperwork current with the National office or by filing to become an independent 501(c)3. Becoming an independent 501(c)3 is a long process that can only be accomplished with the help of a lawyer.

- **DO NOT** post election or candidate-related materials on PFLAG listservs, websites, blogs, or social networking sites
- **DO** tell your chapter members/leaders that if they are going to engage in partisan political activity to clearly state that they are acting in an individual capacity and not on behalf of PFLAG
- **DO NOT**, in your capacity as a PFLAG member or representative, wear any political buttons, t-shirts, etc.

Education and advocacy are important parts of PFLAG's mission and can help make the world a better place for LGBT people and their loved ones. Just remember a few simple rules about what you can and can't do as a 501(c)3 organization, and use the suggestions above to get your chapter active in education and advocacy! Contact your Regional Director or Field Coordinator for chapter education or advocacy activities.

## Working with the Media

PFLAG members are powerful spokespeople – as family, friends and LGBT people, we provide an important perspective on issues of concern to the LGBT community. The work your chapter is doing in your community will be even more effective if you can draw media attention. By speaking out publicly in the media, you have an opportunity to reach a broad audience in your community – and often beyond that – with your message of equality for all. The material provided in this section will help you understand the basics of how to leverage your local media to amplify your message.

### Forming Relationships with Local Media

You can get PFLAG’s message out in a variety of ways. For positive coverage in your local press, it helps to have a good relationship with specific people at your media outlets. Maintaining good media relations takes thought and effort. Here are some suggestions for building your relationship with the press:

- Keep media outlets informed of your chapter’s activities and opinions. You can do this by issuing press releases and media advisories that can be e-mailed to media contacts.
- Make personal contacts.
- Build credibility with reporters by being a resource on LGBT issues in your community. If you can answer journalist’s questions, they will call you when they need help.
- Be persistent, but respectful. Getting a sense as to when to pursue a matter and when to let go will help you be seen as fair.
- Be sensitive to reporters’ time and deadlines. If you respect a journalist’s deadline, they’ll appreciate your effort and remember you when they need help.

People who are successful with media relations are always (and without exception) well-versed in a wide variety of issues in their community and how PFLAG’s issues relate back to the bigger picture. Know what’s happening where you live. Look and listen for articles or TV reports in your area that relate to LGBT issues. When the need to correct something or voice your opinion comes up, make sure that you do it respectfully. And when something positive happens, be sure to weigh in on that, too with a complimentary e-mail, call, or letter to the reporter thanking them for their work.

Keep a list of the reporters who you have identified as LGBT-friendly and be sure to contact them first when you have an event or something related to the LGBT community happens in your area.

## Press Releases and Media Advisories

Press Releases and Media Advisories are the basic tools for getting information to the media. Smaller community publications may simply run your press release or advisory word-for-word. Advisories should go out about two weeks before an event and press releases a day or two before. Media advisories give only the “who, what, where, when, and why” of an event. Press releases are more detailed and can provide an organizational position or statement rather than just logistical information. Prepare your releases with just enough information to make reporters want to find out more, but include enough information that they can run as is.

Both press releases and media advisories should:

- Have a catchy title and lead sentence
- Present the most important information first
- Present opinions, statistics, and quotes from spokespersons

PFLAG National staff would be happy to help draft press releases, review proposed op-eds or letters to the editor or advise on media outreach. Contact your Field Coordinator for media help and check out the media resource page at [www.pflag.org/chaptermediatools](http://www.pflag.org/chaptermediatools).

## Letters to the Editor

Take any opportunity to write a letter to the editor of your local paper — it is one of the most widely read sections. Remember, letters of support are just as important as letters responding to bias or misinformation.

Each newspaper usually prints the guidelines for submitting letters to the editor, so be sure to follow the exact guidelines before writing a letter. Many great letters never see print simply because the writer didn’t follow the publication’s policies.

Here are some general strategies for letters to the editor, but again, be sure to follow specific publication rules:

- **Be relevant.** Tie your letter to a story they’ve published or to an important event that did not get adequate coverage.
- **Be timely.** Respond right away. E-mail, fax, or mail the letter to the “Letters to the Editor” department, or deliver it personally to the reception desk immediately. Don’t wait days before you take action.
- **Be specific.** If you are writing about specific legislation, be sure to mention your local, state, or federal elected officials by name.

- **Keep it short.** Letters to the editor are usually short – no more than 200 words. Keep it tightly written and to the point. If you go over, the likelihood that they will use your letter drops dramatically.
- **Include PFLAG!** List your PFLAG chapter and title (if you have one) under your printed name. For example, “Jane Smith, President, PFLAG Springfield”.
- **Include your information.** Include your address and daytime phone number. Daytime numbers are important since most papers will not run a letter to the editor unless they’ve verified the author.
- **Promote PFLAG, if appropriate.** In the text of the letter, include your helpline phone number and your meeting times if appropriate and relevant to the topic.
- **Follow up.** If you are submitting a letter to a small newspaper, follow up with a phone call to simply confirm that the letter was received.
- **Expect minor changes.** There is likely to be some editing by the newspaper for punctuation, minor style elements, and length.

## Op-Eds

An op-ed, so called because of its placement opposite the editorial page, is longer than a letter to the editor – usually 500-800 words. Also often referred to as an “opinion-editorial”, these are more difficult to get printed than a letter to the editor, but can be very effective at conveying PFLAG’s message.

Here are a few suggestions for writing an op-ed:

- **Pick the right author.** Select someone whose story or voice is appropriate for the message you are trying to send. For example, if you’re writing about how parents respond to a loved one coming out, have a parent who has gone through the experience and can speak firsthand about what it entails.
- **Offer a unique perspective.** If you are simply repeating points made by other people, there’s no real draw to your opinion. If you have a specific point of view and something fresh to offer, you are more likely to interest the publication.
- **Pitch the article ahead of time.** Consider contacting the editorial board and making the case for why your perspective should be featured. If, for example, you want to opine about how the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) is not just about LGBT people, but their families and family concerns about an LGBT loved one being able to work without fear of discrimination, you may need to “sell” the op-ed idea to an editorial board before it moves forward, especially for large publications.

- **Follow the guidelines.** Just like letters to the editor, many papers have specific guidelines for op-eds regarding length and deadlines.
- **Follow-up.** Place a phone call to the op-ed page editor.

Don't be discouraged if your op-ed isn't printed – if at first you don't succeed, try, try again!

## Speakers' Bureau

Another way that many chapters conduct community education and outreach is by setting up a speakers' bureau.

A speaker's bureau is a group of your members who are trained to speak publically about their personal experiences or stories. Your speakers' bureau is a valuable community resource and service your chapter can offer. Public speaking engagements are an excellent way for your PFLAG chapter to educate your community, gain visibility and community reputation, attract new members, and advance PFLAG's mission of support, education, and advocacy. In doing so, your speakers' bureau can be a catalyst for community and coalition building. Speaking engagements provide your chapter with an opportunity to establish relationships with communities of color, the transgender community, people with disabilities, immigrant and working class communities, and more. It can also be the first point of contact with new members, so follow the guidelines below to make it great!

### Getting Started: Find Leaders

- Identify an individual or form a committee to organize speakers, respond to requests for speakers, and to publicize the speakers' bureau to potential audiences.
- The chair should be responsible for identifying the appropriate speakers for the event and finding a moderator. Moderators are experienced speakers who lead a panel, handle difficult situations and/or questions, redirect a topic of conversation, support the other panelists, interact with the host or sponsor, and keep everything running smoothly.
- It is important for the coordinator to make sure that your group of speakers is diverse so that the stories that are told are relevant to the experiences and backgrounds of the audience.

### Tips for Telling Your Story

- **Have a specific tale.** Your story is what you want your audience to know about you. It is your chance to begin connecting with your audience as a real person. Narrow your message by picking a distinct topic or story to share. Appropriate topics include; when you or your child came out and how you or others reacted, coming out in the workplace or your faith community (both as the straight parent of a LGBT child or as LGBT yourself), challenges in the workplace, your relationship with your faith community, safe schools stories, your first PFLAG meeting, or how the lack of protections for you or your LGBT child

has impacted your life. Pick one of these topics and speak on that one topic – don't try to cover too much!

- **Avoid reading from a piece of paper.** Just reading your story isn't persuasive to many people. Practice so that you don't need to read verbatim. This helps people feel like you're engaged in the story. Look up and speak directly and confidently in a clearly audible voice. It's okay to have some short notes to keep you on track, but reading word-for-word is rarely effective.
- **Keep it short.** Keeping your story brief (approximately 4-5 minutes) will help you and your audience focus.
- **Focus on the important stuff.** Keep your story relevant and focused on what is important – leave out superfluous details. For example, people want to know how you felt when your son told you he was gay, not what you were wearing that day.
- **Practice!** Be sure to practice beforehand! Even though it is your story, practice helps keep your nerves at bay and your story concise.
- **Ask people to do something.** PFLAG stories often inspire people to want to take action. It's okay to ask for them to do something at the end of the story. Use your story and the education you have provided to ask the audience to do something like; learn about a specific issue in the LGBT community, give a donation to PFLAG, or support a particular piece of legislation.

Remember that you have a story to tell. Your own story as a member of PFLAG will interest people – it is more personally and emotionally compelling than any statistic and it's the best way to address people's misunderstandings about LGBT people and their families.

### **Hosting Panel Discussions**

Hearing one story is powerful. But being able to offer a few stories and perspectives on a topic can often help people understand the different ways people view topics and help them better connect personally with an issue. Doing this in an organized way is critical to making the format work. One of the most effective ways to accomplish this with your speaker's bureau is to set up panel discussions. A panel provides different perspectives on the same issue and helps your nervous speakers feel that they are not alone.

#### **4 Easy Steps to a Great Panel Discussion**

1. **Identify the right mix of speakers.** Your speakers' bureau coordinator or committee should determine the best participants for any panel discussion. For example, if you're creating a panel discussion about

safe schools issues, include a parent of a child who has experienced bullying, a teacher, and your safe schools coordinator. Including people who have no direct connection to this issue won't help communicate your message.

2. **Prepare speakers ahead of time.** To ensure that your speaking engagements are effective, it is critical to offer training to the members of your speakers' bureau. Training should cover telling a story, how to answer difficult questions, the agenda for a speaking engagement, and lots of practice. Be sure that for any event, each person knows what he or she will specifically speak about.
3. **Keep it concise.** Ask each speaker to share his or her story within a given amount of time. Remember, no one should monopolize the panel.
4. **Let the moderator field questions and maintain the flow.** The moderator should manage time, select the people asking questions, diffuse tense situations, and steer questions to individuals. For some people and situations, written questions tend to be easier for the panel. If possible, ask people to write down their questions and hand them to the moderator who will then help manage the Q&A time.

With these guidelines in mind, your speakers' bureau will inspire, educate, and motivate your community. For more detailed information for speaking engagements and forming a speaker's bureau contact your Regional Director ([www.pflag.org/regionaldirectors](http://www.pflag.org/regionaldirectors)) or Field Coordinator ([www.pflag.org/staff](http://www.pflag.org/staff)).

## Fundraising

We all know how important our work is at PFLAG, which is why it's important to make sure that your chapter has the funds to keep active in your community.

Without even identifying the costs of special programming, routine chapter expenses may include:

- Your telephone helpline
- Providing beverages and snacks for chapter meetings, board meetings, social and outreach events
- Renting space for chapter and board meetings
- Promoting your chapter (placing advertisements, printing and distributing fliers, etc.)
- Distributing publications to new and potential members
- Attending state, regional, and national conferences
- Running a speakers' bureau (trainings, materials, travel costs)
- Purchasing materials for your chapter library, including magazine and newsletter subscriptions
- Hosting trainings for support group facilitators and other committee members
- Renting booths at community fairs and area conferences
- Scholarships for LGBT youth, other youth related events like youth groups, proms, etc.

For many people, the prospect of asking others for money is uncomfortable. Many people were raised to not discuss (and especially not ask) for money. However, one way to get past this barrier is to realize that many people would like to support PFLAG's work and are just looking for someone to extend an invitation to help. For others, realizing that it is only with the support of a broad base of people that your chapter can provide services and resources to your community is the thing that will make them comfortable with fundraising. This chapter offers you some guidelines and suggestions to help you become comfortable with asking for support – and making it effective when you make that ask!

### Things to Consider When Fundraising

The best way to raise money for your chapter is to directly ask people in your community for donations. The majority of money raised by non-profits in the US is raised through individual donors. Donors appreciate the opportunity to direct their money to things they care about that create positive change in people's lives and in their communities. When you make and ask consider:

- **Be specific.** When asking for donations, it's helpful to ask for a specific amount of money to support a specific project. For example, ask for a donation of \$50 or \$100, "to help our chapter distribute 1000 copies of the Cultivating Respect Safe Schools publication to teachers, principals, and counselors". In this example, the donor knows specifically where their money is going and you are educating the donor about the work of PFLAG.
- **Let people know that contributions to PFLAG are tax-deductible.** Donations to your chapter are tax-deductible. PFLAG is a non-profit, 501(c)3 organization. When your affiliation paperwork is successfully completed, your chapter can accept donations that the donor can count as a tax deduction. If you have not completed the affiliation process or do not have your own independent 501(c)3, you cannot legally accept contributions. To find out if your chapter is included in PFLAG's group exemption or has an independent 501(c)3, contact the Chapter Services Coordinator ([www.pflag.org/staff](http://www.pflag.org/staff)).

### Who Should You Ask?

There are many potential sources for financial and in-kind donations that can support the work of your chapter. They just need to be asked. Don't know how (or who) to go about asking? Check out these guidelines:

- **Brainstorm with chapter members and friends.** Build a list of contacts you already have with businesses, business associations, service clubs, community foundations, faith community organizations, unions, persons of wealth, etc. Start with people that you know and who know PFLAG's work. Set up meetings with them to discuss the work your chapter is doing or planning, and ask how they can contribute.
- **Use your network for help.** Meet for advice about potential funding sources with local fundraisers, foundation board members, and bank trust officers. Ask people if they know of any local community foundations that might be willing to support your work.
- **Make giving easy.** For individuals, make giving easy by having donation cards, monthly pledge options, and/or membership forms available.
- **Use your existing communications vehicles.** Run special fundraising appeals in your chapter newsletter or in special mailings. This is most effective when you have a particular project you are funding and donors can really see the benefit their contribution is making possible.
- **Go beyond cash.** Clearly, financial contributions are most often needed to keep chapters doing their work, but don't forget that some local businesses may be able to offer in-kind contributions to help support your efforts. From offering prizes and awards for events, to giving you space and catering

services, to providing resources for advertising, don't minimize or forget about these kinds of contributions.

### Common Fundraisers

- **Membership Dues:** Memberships dues can help raise most of the money needed to fund your chapter. Offer membership to everyone, even if they don't attend meetings. It's an easy way for someone to support the work of your chapter and to stay informed of your progress. The amount you charge your members in dues is up to your chapter but should include the \$15 you send to PFLAG National for each household member. It's common for chapters to set membership levels between \$30 and \$50.
- **House Parties:** For PFLAG chapters, house parties can be an especially effective way to educate donors about programs and raise funds for specific projects. They are generally inexpensive, fun, and informative. A small crowd (15-30 people) is desirable and achieves a level of intimacy. To get significant commitments, the more personal the invitation, the better. In addition to mailed invitations, each invitee to a house party should receive a telephone follow-up call (preferably by someone they know) to describe the goal or purpose of the party. Make sure people know that this is a fundraiser. Your Field Coordinator ([www.pflag.org/staff](http://www.pflag.org/staff)) can help you find the people to develop these kinds of events.

### Ideas for Fundraising Events

- Softball, volleyball, golf, or tennis tournaments
- Dinners, luncheons, banquets, barbecues, and fish fries
- Casino nights (if allowed in your state)
- Benefit performances by a local theater and/or musical group
- Coffees, teas, cocktail, and chocolate parties
- Block parties
- Runs and walk-a-thons
- Rummage or garage sales
- Auctions, raffles, and lotteries (with prizes donated by local businesses)
- Ticketed movie screenings, concerts, dance presentations

## **Follow Up**

When someone donates, make sure you follow up with a thank you letter or visit one week after the meeting. Be sure to acknowledge contributions (with the donor's permission) in your publications and events. Tie the gifts that they've made to specific accomplishments. For example, "With the support of John and Mary Jones, we were able to train and provide resources to 15 teachers in our school district this year through our Cultivating Respect program". This gesture gives the proper thanks to your donors and demonstrates the kind of impact other potential donors can have when they support your work.

Most chapters can function and be very successful on membership dues alone. If you want to embark on a fundraising campaign, be sure to make a plan for what you will do with the money and strategize about what your fundraising goals. Fundraising can seem intimidating, but with practice and patience you can raise money for you chapter – just focus on selling the vital service that your chapter provides!

## Conclusion

There is so much to know about running a successful PFLAG chapter that we could offer a 1000-page manual and there would still be things to learn! Hopefully, this manual has provided you with the basics that you'll need to get started.

Ultimately, the best way to learn how to run a PFLAG chapter is to run a PFLAG chapter. More than 30 years of PFLAGers have learned how to create wonderfully supportive, creative, influential, transformative, and active chapters in their community.

Your best resources are not this manual (although it should help you get started), but are your Field Coordinator, your Regional Director, and your fellow PFLAGers! Go visit another chapter, join the PFLAGall listserv, call the PFLAG National Office when you have questions, and feel confident knowing they you are providing an integral service to your community and to families everywhere. On behalf of PFLAG's staff and leaders, thank you for everything that you do to move equality forward.

Good luck and stay in touch. We're here for you.