Guidelines for LGBTQI+ Inclusive Youth Work

Creating Safe & Affirming Spaces
for All Young People

plan IMPACT

youthpeace ambassadors network

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This guideline was developed by the participants of the *Rainbow the Future! Training Course & Seminar in LGBTQI+ Awareness in Youth Work*, drawing on their experiences from the local actions carried out as part of the project. The Rainbow the Future project offered insights for youth workers seeking to make their daily practices in youth work more inclusive, reflective, and empowering for LGBTQi+ young people. The following learnings can help strengthen everyday work and inform long-term approaches in youth settings. The guideline is structured into two parts:

- General guidelines for inclusive LGBTQI+ work
- How to execute an inclusive LGBTQI+ project

General Guidelines for inclusive LGBTQI+ work

a) Fostering Safe and inclusive Environments
Both physical and emotional safety are essential foundations for meaningful youth work.
- *Design visible safe spaces:* Create areas in your youth center or programs that clearly signal acceptance, diversity, and belonging. Even small gestures—like inclusive symbols or affirming posters—help young people feel seen and secure.
- *Listen actively and without judgment:* Make space for open dialogue where young people can express their experiences freely. Reflective group discussions or informal check-ins encourage mutual understanding and trust.
- *Build trust through consistency and boundaries:* Trust grows when youth workers are reliable and transparent. Maintain contact through consistent communication, but also define professional boundaries such as working hours and communication frequency to ensure healthy relationships for all.

b) Strengthening Educational and Communication Skills
Inclusive communication helps make complex topics understandable and accessible to everyone.
- *Simplify and adapt:* Break down complex issues into digestible, relatable discussions suited to your group's age, interests, and background.
- *Meet people where they are:* Adapt activities to the participants' needs and abilities. This includes offering hybrid participation options or ensuring spaces are physically and emotionally accessible to everyone.
- *Communicate mindfully:* Use inclusive, non-judgmental language. Avoid jargon or slang that might exclude others, and be patient in explaining or repeating concepts when needed.

c) Improving Project and Community Management

Practical project management skills make youth work more sustainable and effective.

- **Be resourceful:** Collaborate with existing LGBTQi+ and ally networks to share tools, knowledge, and experiences instead of starting from scratch.
- **Engage strategically:** involve partners, volunteers, or community members with relevant expertise, such as media, facilitation, or grant writing.
- **Plan sustainably:** Continuously monitor and evaluate your activities. Use frameworks like SMART goals or the MEAL (Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning) approach to ensure your projects stay realistic and adaptable to evolving needs.

d) Reflecting on Self-Awareness and Privilege

Inclusive youth work starts with honest self-reflection.

- Regularly consider your own identity, position, and privileges, and how these may influence your work.
- Use this awareness to challenge bias and to ensure that every young person—especially those facing multiple forms of exclusion—feels welcomed and respected.
- Reflection can be done individually or within peer support groups among youth workers to encourage learning and accountability.

e) Addressing Discrimination and Promoting inclusion

Youth workers play a central role in creating environments that challenge discrimination and encourage understanding.

- Safe and brave spaces: Foster both kinds of spaces—safe for authenticity and brave for respectful, challenging conversations about inequality.
- intersectional approach: Recognize how gender, sexuality, race, disability, and other identities intersect to shape each young person's experience.
- Nonviolent Communication (NVC): Apply NVC principles to encourage empathy, understanding, and dialogue even in moments of conflict.

f) Understanding Context and Preventing Harm

Being aware of context and potential risks helps ensure youth work is both ethical and empowering.

- *Trauma-informed practice:* Recognize that some young people may have experienced discrimination, rejection, or trauma. Be sensitive to potential triggers and always prioritize consent and emotional safety.
- *Prevent additional risk:* Protect confidentiality and avoid any actions that could expose young people to stigma or danger due to their identity or participation.
- *Stay informed and adaptable:* Continue learning about the social, legal, and cultural realities affecting LGBTQi+ youth, and adapt your approaches accordingly.

How to execute and inclusive LGBTQI+ project

Before beginning any youth work project, it is essential to ground it in the principle of intersectional inclusivity, safe and non-violent environment and LGBTQI+ awareness. This means recognizing and respecting how different identities, such as gender and sexual identity and expression (SOGIESC), ethnicity, disability, and socio-economic background, interconnect and shape people's experiences. Every stage of the project should reflect this understanding.

STEP 1 - The Conceptualization

Define Purpose and Goals
Establish clear aims and guiding principles for the project. These should be realistic, measurable, and inclusive. Assess their feasibility with your team and community.

Identify the Target Group
Specify who the project aims to reach (LGBTQI+ youth, allies, educators).

Assess Needs
Conduct research to understand the specific needs and priorities of your target group. Include community consultation or focus groups to ensure authentic representation.

Analyse Context
Understand the social, cultural, and political environment in which the project will operate. Identify potential barriers or enablers for LGBTQI+ inclusion.

Define Outcomes and Duration
Clarify the intended results and how long the project will run.

Determine Geographical Scope
Specify where the project will take place and ensure accessibility for participants from diverse regions or backgrounds.

STEP 2 - Planning

A project cannot succeed without clear, inclusive, and well-structured planning. Ensure that LGBTQI+ perspectives are present from the start and throughout the decision-making process.

Inclusive Planning Practices

- *Clarify Roles and Responsibilities:* Identify who will be responsible for each part of the project.

- *Ensure Representation:* Include queer individuals and allies in leadership and planning teams.

- *Set Inclusive Objectives:* Develop goals that promote equality, empowerment, and belonging.

- *Design Participation Strategies:* Consider how to reach marginalized youth, ensuring safe and affirming spaces.

STEP 3 - Implementation

During implementation, be flexible and responsive. Not all activities will unfold exactly as planned, and adaptability is essential for maintaining inclusivity.

Inclusive Implementation Measures

- Review all materials and plans through an LGBTQI+ lens, preferably with input from queer community members.

- Use **inclusive application** forms that include:
    - Official and **preferred names**
    - **Pronouns**
    - **Room preferences** aligned with gender identity
    - **Food preferences** respecting cultural and dietary needs

- Use **inclusive language** in all communications, descriptions, and sessions.

- Promote **intersectionality awareness** through activities such as privilege walks, storytelling, or LARP-based empathy exercises.

- Use **diverse visuals** representing various genders, ethnicities, and body types in all materials.

- Invite **guest speakers** or facilitators who embody intersectional experiences.

- Ensure **accessibility** in participant mobilization (e.g., Braille materials, sign language interpretation, captioning, wheelchair-friendly venues).

Mapping of the local actions as part of the Rainbow the Future project

STEP 4 - Evaluating and Monitoring

Evaluation should not only measure success but also ensure that inclusivity remains a continuous practice.

Key Evaluation Actions
1. Collect feedback from participants with attention to inclusion, safety, and accessibility.
2. Include LGBTQI+ participants in evaluation design and analysis.
3. Assess whether project outcomes effectively met the identified needs.
4. Use insights to strengthen future inclusivity and advocacy.

STEP 5 - Make Advocacy Inclusive

Advocacy is most powerful when it amplifies the voices of those directly affected. Inclusive advocacy means representation, accessibility, and authenticity at every stage.

Guidelines for Inclusive Advocacy

- *Center Lived Experiences:* Prioritize the voices, stories, and leadership of LGBTQI+ individuals.

- *Use Accessible Language:* Communicate in clear, inclusive, and easily understandable terms adapted to your audience.

- *Apply Neurosensitive Tools:* Use visuals, infographics, and storytelling to convey complex issues accessibly.

- *Ensure Team Diversity:* Build advocacy teams that reflect a variety of identities and experiences.

- *Promote Accessibility:* Hold events in wheelchair-friendly, gender-inclusive, and sensory-considerate spaces.

- *Practice Continuous Learning:* Stay informed about evolving terminology, rights, and needs within LGBTQI+ communities.