



STRENGTHS AND NEEDS ASSESSMENT



Cultivating support, inclusion, and respect for LGBTQIA+ communities in the Omaha metro: A strengths and needs assessment

BACKGROUND

Approximately 1 in 10 people in the U.S. identifies as LGBTQIA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, bigender, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual and non-binary and additional identities).¹

Based on this estimate, the Omaha metro area is home to more than 81,000 people who identify as LGBTQIA+.² Of this population, about 7 in 10 people have experienced stigma.³

1 in 10
Identifies as LGBTQIA+

7 in 10
Have experienced stigma

The LGBTQIA+ Equality Fund was created to address this need and support LGBTQIA+ communities in the Omaha metro area. The Equality Fund is working to cultivate a community that supports, includes, and respects LGBTQIA+ individuals and families.

The fund is a collaboration of The Sherwood Foundation, Mutual of Omaha, Conagra Brands Foundation, Peter Kiewit Foundation, and the Omaha Community Foundation.

All funding decisions are made by a group of community members representing Omaha's LGBTQIA+ communities.⁴

Methodology

The Equality Fund launched a strengths and needs assessment in 2017 to learn how to best support inclusion and respect for LGBTQIA+ communities in the Omaha metro.⁵ During this process, the fund spent time meeting, strategizing, and engaging in intentional and meaningful outreach with members of Omaha's LGBTQIA+ communities to assure as many diverse voices as possible were heard throughout the assessment. Hundreds of people who identify as a member of LGBTQIA+ communities and live in Omaha's metro area (Douglas, Sarpy, and Pottawattamie Counties) shared their thoughts, experiences, and ideas. Specifically:

- **288 people completed a survey**
- **About 20 people participated in community-led discussions**
- **5 staff from organizations that support LGBTQIA+ communities participated in interviews**
- **At 2018 Heartland Pride and Heartland Youth Pride, people mapped LGBTQIA+ assets, such as supportive businesses**

We would like to thank the many individuals and organizations that participated in this strengths and needs assessment. This work would not have been possible without your participation and insights.

This report highlights the main findings of the strengths and needs assessment. Each of the following pages highlights a main finding. The final page outlines top funding priorities for support of LGBTQIA+ communities as identified by people who participated in the strengths and needs assessment. The last page defines key terms that are used throughout the report.

FINDING:

Inclusion in the broader Omaha metro community is a work in progress.

- The broader Omaha metro community is becoming more inclusive of LGBTQIA+ communities, but more work needs to be done.

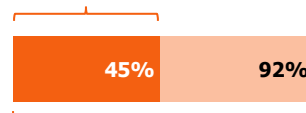
Some survey respondents pointed to pockets of support for LGBTQIA+ people in the broader Omaha metro.

*"There is support for the LGBTQIA+ community in select urban pockets in eastern Omaha."*⁶

- Fewer than half of respondents feel the broader Omaha community is open-minded and welcoming.

- Most people said it is important for the broader Omaha metro community to be open-minded and welcoming toward LGBTQIA+ people, but fewer than half feel the broader community actually is open-minded and welcoming.

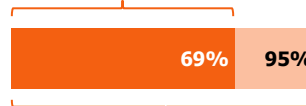
45% said the broader community is open-minded and welcoming



92% said it is important that the broader community be open-minded and welcoming

- Most people said it is important to feel safe in public gathering spaces, but only 69% actually feel safe in public gathering spaces.

69% said I feel safe in public gathering spaces



95% said it is important to feel safe in public gathering spaces

- Those who identify as transgender and have non-binary identities feel least supported by the broader community, while cisgender women feel most supported.

- Increasing knowledge about LGBTQIA+ communities could support inclusion.

Discussion group participants feel that a lack of knowledge about LGBTQIA+ communities within the broader Omaha community is a possible reason for a disconnect between LGBTQIA+ people and the broader community.

FINDING: **Inclusion within Omaha's LGBTQIA+ communities is a work in progress.**

- **People experience marginalization from within LGBTQIA+ communities.**
This marginalization could be based on their LGBTQIA+ identity (such as being transgender); another aspect of their identity (such as being African-American); or on a combination of—the intersectionality of—multiple identities (such as being transgender and African-American).
- **Privilege within LGBTQIA+ communities mirrors that of the broader community.**

LGBTQIA+ groups and initiatives are typically led by those who are cisgender, white, and male.

"It's cis-white gay men that, if it isn't catered just for them, then they are angry about it. And we've just been the victim of that too many times."

"There are some groups that have been around for a long time and they have had consistent attendance etc., but they seem to be really white-led and many are unwilling to diversify."

- **People ask for inclusive places and information.**
 - Leverage the diversity within Omaha's LGBTQIA+ communities for equitable representation. Engage more individuals in the work, and equitably value the work of all.
 - Establish a welcoming, inclusive, all-ages LGBTQIA+ gathering space that is not centered around alcohol.
 - Find ways to communicate information, such as LGBTQIA+ events, knowledgeable medical providers, resources for basic needs, and more.
- **The three most pressing concerns within LGBTQIA+ communities are support for specific identities:**

→ Trans people

→ People of color (POC)

→ Immigrants

FINDING: LGBTQIA+ youth are an asset for the community and need support.

→ Groups and events that serve LGBTQIA+ youth are strong.

- Every survey respondent under the age of 18 agreed that community groups are a strength.
- Heartland Youth Pride is an example of a strong event supporting LGBTQIA+ youth.

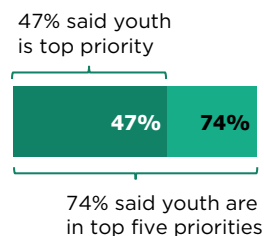
"I think Youth Pride feels safe because of just how the young people make the space feel. It's really 'Come as you are' there."

"I think some of the youth groups work well, partner well together."

→ Youth and adults name LGBTQIA+ youth as a top priority.

Survey respondents ranked areas in need of additional support in Omaha's LGBTQIA+ communities.

- Out of 25 possible options, LGBTQIA+ youth were the number 1 priority for nearly half (47%) of respondents.



- Nearly three-quarters (74%) placed LGBTQIA+ youth in their top five.

- Of respondents younger than 18, 48% selected LGBTQIA+ youth as their number 1 priority for support, and 64% placed youth in their top five.

→ Mental and physical health support are urgent needs for youth:

- Only 4% said their mental health is excellent or very good.
- Only 17% are out about their LGBTQIA+ identity to many or all of their medical providers (including mental health and other service providers).

"[To make the Omaha area better for LGBTQ+ youth, I prioritize] helping teens who are not welcome in their homes ... educating parents who are not supportive and helping them understand their child is no different, [and] giving youth a way to become involved in a COMMUNITY so they can feel strong and supported."

FINDING: Omaha is not meeting LGBTQIA+ community members' basic needs.

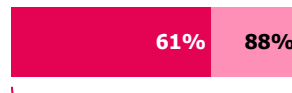
→ Mental health concerns are common.

- About 4 in 5 survey respondents have concerns about their mental health.
- Groups most negatively affected by mental health concerns are people younger than 18 years old, those who identify as transgender and/or non-binary, and those who identify as Hispanic or Latinx.
- Top mental health concerns are anxiety, stress, and depression.

→ There is room for improvement in health care services.

- Health care providers often do not ask about gender and sexuality.
- While most say it's important to be out to medical providers, only about 3 in 5 respondents are actually out to many or all of their medical providers.

61% said they are out to medical providers



88% said it is important to be out to medical providers

"Health care is important, and they [healthcare providers] don't ask about orientation ... but some health concerns are directly related to orientation. It could be that doctors simply don't know to ask."

"We lack comprehensive sexual health care and mental health care services from providers who know, understand, and care about us."

→ Sexuality education needs improvement.

- Only 4% of youth under 18 years old agreed that public schools have comprehensive sexuality education.
- Respondents expressed a desire for funding dedicated to comprehensive LGBTQIA+ sexuality education.

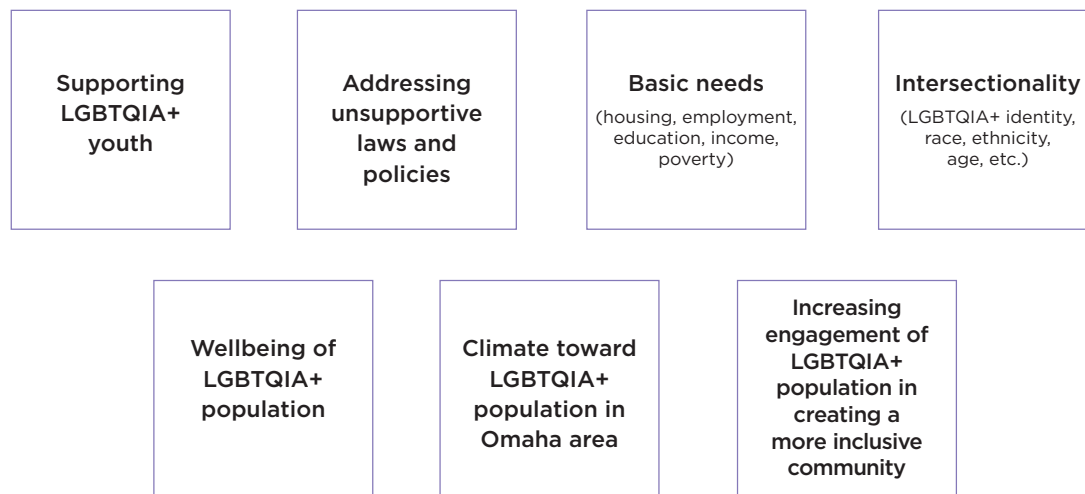
→ A quarter of respondents have experienced homelessness.

- About 1 in 4 survey respondents shared they are currently experiencing homelessness or have experienced homelessness in the past.
- Some people noted a need for inclusive shelters that do not discriminate based on LGBTQIA+ identity, and that provide non-binary gender options.

LGBTQIA+ COMMUNITY MEMBERS IDENTIFIED THEIR TOP PRIORITY AREAS FOR FUNDING.

When asked to choose between needs or strengths as the top priority for future funding, survey respondents overwhelmingly indicated the Equality Fund should support greatest needs before existing strengths.

TOP RATED NEEDS FOR FUNDING:



CONNECT WITH US

Learn more about the LGBTQIA+ Equality Fund or the strengths and needs assessment:

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EQUALITY FUND WEBSITE:

omahafoundation.org/nonprofits/community-interest-funds/lgbtqia-equality-fund/

This strengths and needs assessment was conducted by The Improve Group and Smith & Lehmann Consulting



GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

The definitions below are offered as an introduction to key terms used in this report. They should be understood as abbreviated rather than exhaustive definitions, and reference terms and identities that are fluid rather than fixed.⁷ For additional information, see the Center for Gender Sanity at <http://gendersanity.com/diagram.html>.

Cisgender (cis): people whose gender identity is aligned with their assigned sex at birth.

Gender: a person's felt sense of being man, woman, both, in between, or neither. Gender is a social construct (an idea created by society) and has no relation to a person's assigned sex at birth.

Identity: multiple factors that are part of every human (gender, race, etc.) that, when considered together, make a person who they are.

Intersectionality: the oppression a person experiences due to the intersection of multiple marginalized identities.

Non-binary gender identities: people who do not identify as a man or a woman; non-binary people may identify as both, neither, or any other identity outside these categories.

Sexuality: the components of a person that include their biological sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, and sexual practices.

Transgender (trans): people whose gender identity differs from their assigned sex at birth.

¹Gates, G.J. (2001). How many people are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender?

Jones, R.P. & Cox, D. (2015). How race and religion shape millennial attitudes on sexuality and reproductive health. Public Religion Research Institute.

²For the purpose of this study, the Omaha metro area is defined as Douglas, Sarpy, and Pottawattamie Counties. Population estimates for these counties are based on the United States Census Bureau's 2017 American Community Survey.

³LGBTQIA+ strengths and needs assessment survey result.

⁴For information on the Equality Fund, see <https://omahafoundation.org/nonprofits/community-interest-funds/lgbtqia-equality-fund/>

⁵The Improve Group and Smith & Lehmann Consulting carried out the strengths and needs assessment in 2017-2019.

⁶All quotes are from survey respondents, participants in discussion groups, or interviews.

⁷Key terms throughout the report are paraphrased from definitions provided in the following sources: Crenshaw, K. (1990). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43, 1241; GLADD Media Reference Guide – Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual Glossary of Terms: Glossary of Terms – Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Queer. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.glaad.org/reference/lgbtq>; Glossary of Terms. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.hrc.org/resources/glossary-of-terms>; LGBTQIA Resource Center Glossary. (2019). Retrieved from <https://lgbtqia.ucdavis.edu/educated/glossary>