



PROTECTING PRIDE

AN ORGANIZING GUIDE FOR SUCCESSFULLY
AND SAFELY CELEBRATING LGBTQIA2S+
JOY IN THESE TIMES

ABOUT WESTERN STATES CENTER

Western States Center is one of the United States' leading organizations working to combat white nationalism, strengthen inclusive democracy, and assist civil society to effectively respond to social movements that exploit bigotry and intolerance. Based in the Pacific Northwest and Mountain states, Western States Center serves as a national hub for building movements, developing leaders, shifting culture, and defending democracy to help build a world where everyone can live, love, worship and work free from bigotry and fear.

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Introduction

In 2022, LGBTQIA2S+ Pride Month was marked by the arrest of 31 members of the white nationalist group Patriot Front for conspiracy to riot. The charges stemmed from their alleged plans to target North Idaho Pride Alliance’s event in Coeur d’Alene, Idaho. This was hardly the only Pride or drag event in 2022 to face intimidation and threats. GLAAD **documented** 166 protests and threats targeting drag events in 2022, including a sharp increase during Pride Month. Some were so harassed, organizers canceled their events altogether.

Western States Center supported North Idaho Pride Alliance from the time they began receiving threats nearly two months before Pride 2022, as they bravely faced down local paramilitary groups, through the attention brought on by the arrests of white nationalists attempting to riot, and afterwards. Then and since, we’ve worked with other Pride and drag event organizers who are similarly grappling with how to celebrate as LGBTQIA2S+ communities amid threats and intimidation.

Western States Center is focused on incubating novel approaches to countering organized bigotry and drawing lessons from our

region to promote inclusive democracy at the national level. We believe that white nationalism and other anti-democracy movements can be dismantled by broad, courageous, values-based coalitions that work creatively with nontraditional leaders and all who believe in a robust democracy.

Queer and trans communities are on the frontlines of anti-democracy attacks right now. If our institutions and elected leaders collectively support their rights — and right to exist — a greater foundation will be built to defend democracy in the future.

Anti-LGBTQIA2S+ attacks have only increased. As anti-democracy groups attempt to use bigotry to build political power through intimidation and threats in the streets, legislators across the country are following suit with an unprecedented number of harmful policies. As of May 2023, a **record** 540 anti-LGBTQIA2S+ bills have been introduced in state legislatures, and 45 laws have been enacted. According to **Bridging Divide Initiative’s** (BDI) analysis of **ACLED** data, anti-LGBTQIA2S+ mobilizations have increased dramatically:

➤ Since January 2022, there have been at least 255 anti-LGBTQIA2S+ demonstrations or counter-protests, of which 110 (43%) are known to have included armed, unlawful paramilitary, or white nationalist actors. Though open carry at protests may sometimes be legal, it increases the risk of escalation and can chill free expression through intimidation.

➤ Anti-LGBTQIA2S+ demonstrations have more than tripled in the past 15 months compared to the previous two-year period. In 2020 and 2021, a combined total of 79 anti-LGBTQIA2S+ demonstrations and counter-protests were recorded compared to the 255 recorded in 2022 through April 2023.

➤ Since the middle of 2022, paramilitary, armed, and white nationalist mobilizations have increasingly focused on anti-LGBTQIA2S+ sentiment. In fact, in the past six months since October 2022, fully 50% (68 out of 137) of paramilitary, armed, and white nationalist demonstrations focused on anti-LGBTQIA2S+ bigotry.

Western States Center anticipates threats and attacks to continue targeting events focused on LGBTQIA2S+ joy, liberation and resilience. Especially during Pride Month.

Attempts to prevent LGBTQIA2S+ communities from exercising their First Amendment rights to free expression and assembly will likely be ongoing, and those who support these communities, such as allies, sponsors, and vendors, may face increased intimidation.

At the same time, LGBTQIA2S+ organizers, drag artists, and community leaders embody a proud tradition of creative and successful organizing for justice. From the Oregonians who successfully defeated a homophobic ballot initiative [30 years ago](#), to today's transgender youth who are building coalitions against efforts to restrict their access to care, LGBTQIA2S+ communities and their allies know that Pride is both a celebration and a protest.

From the communities celebrating their first-ever Pride events to the drag artists hosting story hours, LGBTQIA2S+ safety and visibility are not negotiable.

Western States Center has created this guide for organizing stronger and safer LGBTQIA2S+ events based on our experiences and interviews with Pride organizers in our home region of the Pacific Northwest. If you are a Pride or drag event organizer, or would like to support LGBTQIA2S+ rights and celebrations in your community, we hope this guide is useful for you.



PART 1

Laying the Groundwork

The success of a safe and joyful Pride or drag event happens long before the event starts. This section covers tips and recommendations for laying the foundation for a successful event.

BUILDING COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Organizational partnerships and relationships are key to building communities that are invested in safe and successful Pride events. Building partnerships is not just a feel-good exercise or source of financial support. Partnerships in sectors across civil society, such as government, business, faith and community organizations are vital in building the support needed to keep our events safe. They can also provide political backing when homophobic and transphobic targeting occurs.

If there's an organization or sector that has a stake in civil rights or democracy, it's worth considering whether they might be a partner. Beyond the nonprofit and community sphere, broadening your base of support to include Chambers of Commerce, local businesses, elected officials, neighborhood associations, arts and cultural institutions, and social

service organizations can take partnerships to the next level by cultivating powerful allies and multipliers for your message ahead of Pride.

Pride organizers can also encourage leaders to be more vocal in their support of the LGBTQIA2S+ community, while solidifying the support of existing allies. Keeping in regular contact with sponsors and creating opportunities to speak out, such as leading sign-on letters, creating databases of inclusive businesses, and providing ways for sponsors to broadcast their support via symbols and stickers, are all effective options.

As Walt Donges of 406 Pride recommended: "If you know that you have a split Chamber of Commerce or a city commission, go to them. Go to them and say, 'Hey, on such and such a date, we're going to have a Pride celebration. We would enjoy your support. Would you issue a proclamation?'"

Donges found that broad outreach in unconventional directions can move local government and other key institutions to a supportive stance. “Billings is one of the most conservative cities in the state, if not the most conservative. And so the opportunity for a single organization to make a difference is huge.”

Of course, making this ask to conservative institutions is not always easy. See the messaging section on page 9 for more tips.

Local Government

For Pride organizers, the relationship with local government can be deeply fraught, deeply supportive, or, most likely, somewhere in between. No matter what, it requires a thoughtful strategy. Demanding that leaders and institutions do their best work on behalf of the whole community is crucial to protecting Pride events. Local government officials have a significant platform to speak out on values and the power to set the stage for how a community responds to Pride events. Even progressive leaders may need to be encouraged to speak out more forcefully, and moderate or conservative leaders may still be reached based on values of free speech or respect for others.

Here are a few concrete ways Pride organizers have successfully engaged with local government:

➤ **Foster coordination.** Organizers for Sandpoint Pride emphasized building and maintaining partnerships throughout the planning

process, and helped coordinate meetings between their local Human Rights Task Force and the city. “We arranged for the President of the Bonner County Human Rights to meet with the City Administrator and the Chief of Police to make sure they had our backs,” said one of their lead organizers.

➤ **Set expectations.** Government agencies have an obligation to protect the right to free expression, access to public spaces, and the ability to gather safely. Even if you are uncertain how receptive local government will be, focusing on these principles may help open up space for dialogue. Depending on local political conditions, government agencies can go much farther in terms of supporting Pride events and organizations, like having civil servants join in a Pride parade, hosting an official city resource booth at a Pride festival, or various forms of fiscal sponsorship.

➤ **Work through local government processes.**

When considering how to approach local government and what your requests can be, understanding its jurisdictions and roles and how it relates to your Pride event is a key step. If a planned parade or festival takes place on city public property, proactively engage with city officials and departments that authorize needed permits and coordinate public safety resources such as the mayor, city council, parks and recreation, fire and police departments.



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➤ **Ask for vocal support.** Pride organizers in multiple cities have asked government officials for statements in support of an upcoming Pride event. These statements could be a mayoral proclamation for Pride month or a public message in the press.

The day before Boise Pride Festival kicked off, Mayor Lauren McLean issued this public statement: “I appreciate the actions the Boise Pride Festival is taking to protect everyone who will join in their celebration this weekend. I applaud their continued focus on providing a positive, inclusive, community-based event where our LGBTQIA+ friends, neighbors, and family members can come together in celebration and community. Boise is always at its best when we come together, stand shoulder to shoulder with one another... The inflammatory rhetoric of the past few days has put a spotlight on the critical need for our community to have a conversation about standing together in times like these to encourage, embrace, and support the diversity and dignity of all people.”

While this kind of support is ideal, it might not always be possible. Having a public figure simply affirm the constitutional rights of all people, such as peaceful assembly and freedom of expression, might be a step in the right direction in some contexts. Similarly, presenting direct evidence of threats to Pride and asking officials to clearly reject violence can sometimes work. Prior to the Coeur d’Alene, Idaho Pride event in 2022, local government officials were silent despite being asked to speak out. However, after the Patriot Front arrests, the Coeur d’Alene mayor [said publicly](#), “We’re not going back to the days of the Aryan Nations.” And the Coeur d’Alene city council reserved the local park for Pride 2023 as a proactive sign of support.

Law Enforcement

Determining your event’s relationship with law enforcement can be a thorny issue that is affected by discrimination and a history of law enforcement oppression of LGBTQIA2S+ people. Courtney Neubauer, organizer for Klamath Pride, said their group had to “hash out what that looked like, knowing several members of our police were connected to [anti-democracy] groups. We also thought a huge police presence at the event could mean potentially some people wouldn’t come to the event.”

At the same time, threats of violence against Pride events mean some communities may decide that law enforcement engagement is important. Each community should weigh the risks and benefits of different types of law enforcement contact. Some factors to consider include:

- How organized and prepared your event’s safety team is
- Whether you’ve created emergency plans for new direct threats or violence at the event, and if those plans involve police outreach
- What compromises can be agreed upon with law enforcement, such as having police stand only outside the boundaries of the event
- Your group’s judgment about the risk of police engagement adversely affecting event participants
- Whether you’re able to establish a working relationship with law enforcement that gives you confidence they will handle the event responsibly and collaboratively

Despite these concerns, some interviewees shared that investing in shifting relationships with law enforcement paid off over time, whether they faced anti-LGBTQIA2S+ bigotry within law enforcement or whether police

did not take threats seriously because they believed their locality was too accepting for this targeting to occur. Jessica Mahuron, former outreach director for North Idaho Pride Alliance (and one of the authors of this guide), noted that NIPA benefited from having a member of law enforcement on their Board of Directors. That person “helped make sure different agencies of law enforcement were aware of what was happening” while their Pride in the Park event was being targeted.

Reporting serious threats to law enforcement can create a record that may be relevant in the future. Regardless of your group’s decision about police engagement, we recommend building relationships with local government officials with oversight of law enforcement as an important intermediary. Even when police are largely unaccountable to democratically elected leaders, broad political pressure can sometimes still influence their decisions.

Civic and Community Organizations

Nonprofit and community-based organizations can be a great source of support, visibility, knowledge, and resources. It is important to invest in these relationships so that partner organizations are prepared to speak out when needed.

Public support is especially important when anti-democracy groups attempt to isolate a leader or member organization in your coalition, a common tactic that your opposition may use to manufacture controversy and fracture coalitions. Partners and sponsors can individually release their own statements, or combine forces to publish a joint op-ed, as [Klamath Pride social services partners](#) did. In this statement, the authors powerfully spoke to their organizations’ values and vested interest in supporting Pride. Courtney Neubauer at Klamath Pride explained that the long-term relationships with partners who signed the



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letter made it “easy to mobilize because there was already trust there.”

Partnering to turn bigotry and intimidation on its head can sometimes result in unexpected success. One such story comes from 406 Pride, which partnered with the wildlife park ZooMontana to host a Drag Queen Story Hour at their location. Initially, the event was projected to host around ten families. After state elected officials targeted the event with harmful rhetoric, organizers relied on strong partnerships to turn that around to their advantage. Walt Donges of 406 Pride commented, “We had 2,000 people show up for Drag Queen Story Hour in Billings. From the time we announced we were partnering with ZooMontana, they started having record days of membership sales.”

Relationships with civic and community organizations can provide practical resources in addition to political support. For instance, North Idaho Pride Alliance (NIPA) has a strong partnership with the Human Rights Education Institute (HREI). HREI’s program Love Lives Here CDA provides [confidential reporting](#) of incidents of discrimination, harassment, and violence in the community, and this resource was shared widely by NIPA and HREI leading up to the 2022 Pride event. Partnerships can also ensure that an event successfully serves the entire community. Anne Johnson at Spectrum Center Spokane shared that deliberate outreach to disability justice organizations and

groups with Black, Indigenous, and people of color leadership were particularly important.

For smaller communities, building organizational relationships across distance can be crucial. Silver Valley Pride organizer Ali Koski said, “I was able to lean on my contacts with the North Idaho Pride Alliance for resources. They gave me their template for a safety plan.” Sandpoint Pride worked closely with the Peace and Justice League of Spokane, co-hosting a deescalation training and borrowing safety guidelines.



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Businesses

As more small towns across the country begin to hold Pride events, local business interests are finding they come with an economic boost. Pride organizers can capitalize on this energy by meeting early with local businesses, encouraging networking amongst sponsors, and highlighting affirming businesses year-round in a [database](#).

In Sandpoint, Idaho, organizers held their 2022 Pride celebration on private property, working with two local businesses to use a large parking lot

and outdoor brewery space for booths and performances. These partners took the lead on connecting with other local business leaders during the planning stage and were able to gain more support from elected officials than might otherwise have been possible.

After the first-ever Pride event in Wallace, ID, in 2022, Ali Koski of Silver Valley Pride said, “Silver Valley Pride was extremely profitable



Support from major employers can create social and economic pressure to deter hate from spreading.

for the community because we put events at so many places. On this one day in Wallace, almost every business put a Progress flag in their window, which is amazing, because until then you couldn't find one anywhere. It got businesses to become invested in this festival because it brought people who in turn brought money and positivity. Of course, it brought them a little backlash too. But mostly it was a positive experience for the businesses involved." She added, "Wallace Chamber of Commerce has really stepped up. They want to put us on their calendar and share the event."

With the rise of anti-democracy groups targeting Pride events and drag shows in 2022, organizers found that some community partners were uneasy about publicity but remained supportive. An organizer of Sandpoint Pride

shared that some businesses wanted to keep a low profile out of fear of potential backlash. These businesses "continued to be supportive, but they didn't want their business name to be publicized or their logo on the website."

Consider honoring requests to keep support non-public. Public retractions of support can be a more damaging outcome than having a smaller initial list of backers. For non-public supporters, collaborating on creative alternatives for businesses to internally support Pride in lieu of participating in major events can continue building the relationship. For example, a local bookstore could order more books representing LGBTQIA2S+ characters and history or a healthcare company could invest in training to better provide informed and inclusive care.

Any support from major employers can create social and economic pressure to deter

hate from spreading. “We set up meetings with major employers in the area and got a couple to submit external messages of support. If major employers are showing support, that makes it potentially a higher risk for people to target us,” Courtney Neubauer of Klamath Pride said.

Walt Donges of 406 Pride shared how his team worked to educate and create a safer community by meeting with local healthcare clinics, and brainstormed how providers can show support. Walt proposed an idea to wear small rainbow pins, explaining “LGBTQIA2S+ people are conditioned to look for support wherever they go. If we see even a tiny rainbow, we will know this could be a safe place. That eliminates the first barrier. The hospital and clinic have adopted this, and have rainbows and pronouns on their badges.”

For public sponsors, creating a shared plan to respond when backlash is anticipated can be essential. Pride organizers shared that even when their event was targeted by bigoted and anti-democracy groups, the vast majority of businesses remained committed. As Donald Williamson of Boise Pride shared, “99% of our sponsors chose to stay in the festival. We had a very small handful that chose to withdraw their physical presence. We had some sponsors that dug in their heels, rolled up their sleeves and publicly got in the trenches with us and made fantastic public statements. The vast majority of sponsors had a physical presence there, but didn’t say a word.”

By identifying key business partnerships and focusing on them year-round, Pride organizers can build a community coalition with the capacity to stand up to hate.

MESSAGING

A thoughtful approach to communicating with core supporters and the broader community throughout the event-planning process is essential. Anti-democracy and bigoted groups may try to exploit your Pride event as a platform for their own message, presenting both challenges and opportunities, and a strong communications strategy will integrate that possibility into the plan.

Lead with values-based messaging that reflects your community. For example, a Sandpoint Pride organizer connected the local culture for charitable activities with the event: “Sandpoint always steps up with donations, volunteers, food, and money... I wanted to help people marshal that kind of energy into helping us create a safe experience for Pride.”

To mobilize local support beyond the LGBTQIA2S+ community and allied groups, North Idaho Pride Alliance wrote in a press release for Pride in the Park, “We welcome all, even those not currently connected with the LGBTQIA2S+ community, to join us in positivity. We are just one group of people that have been targeted in North Idaho within the last two years. We offer our celebration as a way to stand in solidarity against bullying and intimidation by gathering in the very opposite of that — in kindness, neighborliness, and love... For those opposed to a Pride celebration happening in Coeur d’Alene we ask at a minimum you acknowledge and respect the 1st Amendment rights to peaceful assembly and freedom of speech that we all as Americans

enjoy. Attacking the 1st Amendment rights of one group, no matter how fervently you disagree or even hate them, is an attack on liberty and the United States Constitution. Long-term, freedom-loving Idahoans know our true values are to live and let live.”

If you encounter bigoted opposition, focus on strengthening your own message. Be careful not to repeat the elements of the opposition’s frame. Typically, it’s not helpful to debunk opposition arguments point-by-point as this can amplify their message to your audience and local media. For example, if an anti-democracy group accuses your event of harming children, **don’t** say, “Pride events in no way harm children.” **Do** say, “We reject these outlandish and bigoted claims and prioritize inclusion and safety for LGBTQIA2S+ people of all ages.”

Klamath Pride was able to turn harmful “protect the children” messaging around by repeatedly pointing out their opposition’s threats to family and children. Organizers responded by arguing that bigoted actors “were coming after our kids... and we need our elected officials and community leaders to stand by and say this violence does not belong here.”

Regular monitoring of anti-LGBTQIA2S+ activity can help identify disinformation campaigns early and prevent them from gaining traction. See our monitoring section below for more details on how to set up a monitoring routine and connect this practice back to your messaging.

Careful communication is important not only for external audiences, but also for the event’s vendors, supporters, volunteers, and attendees. Transparent communication leading up to the event should include clear information about safety guidelines and what to do in a difficult situation.

In the week before Pride in the Park, North Idaho Pride Alliance sent out separate letters



Be sure to center joy in your communications.

for volunteers and vendors. This included logistics, event marketing resources, maps, schedules, roles, contact and safety information. Organizers also shared information to attendees directly and through local media about what to expect on the day of the event and what to do if they need help: “Attendees can request that a North Idaho Pride Alliance volunteer escort them to their vehicles or elsewhere in the park or ask for help by going to the Information Booth located near the stage.” Communications to attendees may also include a non-engagement policy regarding anti-LGBTQIA2S+ actors, such as the examples in the following section.

And last but not least, be sure to center joy in your communications. Pride events aim to provide safe spaces for LGBTQIA2S+ communities to celebrate. Anne Johnson explains, “One thing we always focus on is queer joy,

because so many of the narratives are about the discrimination, pain, and the hardships we face as a community. All of which is very valid and real. But oftentimes what gets left out of that conversation is the joy and resiliency. So that's why we make a point to also

have those elements of fun and focus on that as a narrative.”

For a more in-depth resource on communicating about organized bigotry, see our resource [A Community Guide to Opposing Hate](#).

SAFETY PLANNING

When planning Pride events, it is important to consider the potential for disruption arising from anti-democracy groups' flyering, threats, counter-demonstrations, and even violence. Bigoted movements use intimidation and political violence to shrink the space for civic participation from marginalized communities. Our goal in this section is to focus on ways to enhance safety for Pride events while upholding the importance of taking up space and celebrating our community.

1. MAKE A PLAN

A proactive and detailed safety plan is key to making Pride events a success no matter the political climate. While this guide will focus on risks from anti-LGBTQIA2S+ activity, safety planning encompasses a wide range of preparations for a public event, from lost kids to medical situations to inclement weather. By creating contingency plans, Pride organizations can prepare to react constructively and quickly to many different potential problems. As Ali Koski of Silver Valley Pride shared, having your own safety plan is also helpful in establishing a productive partnership with local government or law enforcement. “I can go to the sheriff's department and say ‘Here is my safety plan. How can we incorporate you?’ They were impressed that we even thought that far.” She also found that having independently trained community peacekeepers was a positive step. “I think law enforcement appreciated that we had our own security

team as well. So we weren't just hoping for the best and expecting them to do all the heavy lifting.” Sandpoint Pride even published the [public-facing version](#) of their safety plan on their website to increase transparency and community buy-in. Dr. Sarah Lynch of North Idaho Pride Alliance emphasized the importance of relationships in safety planning: “At the end of the day, you have to know who to call when stuff gets ugly.” And in Spokane, organizers hired bouncers from local queer bars because of their skills at crowd control. As part of your planning, consider consulting the Institute for Constitutional Advocacy and Protection's guide outlining the [legal landscape](#) for Pride and drag events.

Your safety plan should likely include:

- Clear information about who is responsible for roles like liaising with venue owners, law enforcement, press, vendors, performers and volunteers
- A call sheet with contact information for people in charge and for key partners
- A map of your venue with exits marked
- A set of contingency plans for emergencies like extreme weather, a participant in need of emergency medical assistance, a lost child or an incident of violence

2. THINK CREATIVELY AND IN COMMUNITY

Many forms of bigoted opposition can be successfully countered and defused using community organizing strategies. For example, if your community is facing bigoted flyer campaigns or angry speakers at City Council meetings ahead of your event, you can consider collecting flyers or “[sponsoring](#)” [speakers](#) for a [lemons-to-lemonade campaign](#), meeting with elected officials behind the scenes to solidify relationships, and organizing allies to speak up on your behalf in meetings.

A well-organized community can even blunt the possibility of violence. When Klamath Pride organizers’ monitoring work found threats of a potential vehicular attack on their location, organizers called on the local government to ensure high-quality barriers around their Pride event. When elected officials refused, organizers went to the press, gained public support, and successfully pushed them to change their minds.

3. INVEST IN TRAINING

Organizing a group of volunteers charged with ensuring the event’s safety is an important step. These volunteers should all be trained in de-escalation and peacekeeping skills so that the event has in-house capacity to respond to homophobic and transphobic targeting and can reduce reliance on law enforcement. Peace and Justice Action League of Spokane

(PJALS) has a peacekeeper training program, and their [peacekeeping handout](#) is a helpful resource with checklists and guidelines for organizers. Bridging Divides Initiative provides a comprehensive [list of training resources](#) for dozens of states in addition to nationally available resources.

4. CONSIDER DIGITAL SAFETY

Digital safety is a critical component of event safety. Every individual who will be publicly identified as a representative of the Pride organization should connect with organizations that work to prevent doxxing and other

forms of online targeting well ahead of any planned publicity for Pride events. [Equality Labs](#) and [Urgent Action Fund](#) may offer this type of individual support. Considering the intensity of disinformation and targeting about

drag performances in particular, be sure to offer this resource to performers. Sponsors and vendors should also be alerted to potential targeting in advance; proactively providing talking points to use in case of bigoted blow-back and creating plans for potential targeting of online business listings can ensure that

sponsors and vendors feel confident and prepared. Few good resources exist to address politically motivated negative reviews on platforms like Yelp and Google, but creating a plan to push back with positive reviews from community members can help.

5. COMMUNICATE ABOUT SAFETY

Clear and consistent communication with attendees ahead of Pride events is a vital component of preparing and safeguarding your attendees. This should ideally include a non-engagement policy for attendees when it comes to dealing with bigoted opposition on the day of the event, instructions on where to report concerning activity that people may see online, and relevant information about day-of safety protocols, such as how to get de-escalation support or help from event organizers if needed. Consider proactively speaking with vendors and sponsors to find out whether they are experiencing harassment from anti-democracy groups and ensure they know to reach out to you early if it happens.

Sandpoint Pride's publication of their [safety plan](#) on their website brought principled clarity to their approach and transparency for community members who had safety concerns ahead of the event. They used values-based messaging to communicate their non-engagement policy: "Zero Engagement with Protesters. In the event of a protest, follow

the mindset of a peacekeeper. Do not engage in negative dialogue or debate. Debating only serves to reinforce their belief they have a valid position. Our rights, freedom, dignity, our lives, are not debatable."

When threats against North Idaho Pride Alliance's event were publicized nearly a month in advance, NIPA issued a [statement](#) asserting that they would not be intimidated or deterred, encouraging the public not to engage with anti-LGBTQIA2S+ actors online or in person, offering options for reporting threats, and expressing confidence in a safe and joyful upcoming event.

Inform attendees that they should feel empowered to say no if asked for an interview with a press outlet and that they can and should direct inquiries back to the official Pride point of contact for the media. This is especially important considering the proliferation of anti-democracy and bigoted groups that cultivate their own "media" personalities and use video cameras as a way to escalate conflict.

6. TOUGH DECISIONS

A safety plan should consider all scenarios, and although nobody ever wants to postpone or cancel a Pride event, we know that this can be necessary on rare occasions in order to ensure community safety. Not all situations

can be adequately addressed through creative organizing, nor can sufficient community support always be built on the necessary timeline.

In the recent past, many Pride planning teams have had the space to focus exclusively



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on concerns like booking performers, gathering sponsors, and putting on a successful celebration in contexts where little if any bigoted opposition was expected. Unfortunately, conditions in many of our communities have shifted rapidly, and a sober analysis of potential risks and existing community support is key to keeping both organizers and attendees safe. If your event planning team is not well-positioned to execute some of the tasks described above, that's okay, but it may mean that you have to rethink some of your plans. This has been the case for organizations like Bookman's Entertainment Exchange in Arizona, which chose to postpone a 2023 Drag Queen Story Hour planned at one of its Tucson stores after bigoted targeting. [Their statement](#) on postponing the event as they searched for a new and more secure venue

is a great model for how to be transparent about a difficult situation while providing assurances that Bookman's is still determined to show support for the LGBTQIA2S+ community.

A small-town Pride organizer who had to take the difficult step of canceling an event due to concerns about bigoted opposition told us that safety concerns took center stage shortly after the Patriot Front arrests in Coeur d'Alene. The organizer found that as they planned the event, "We didn't have a coalition. It's great when you have people willing to organize and take the lead, but without a broad-based coalition from the community, it puts too much pressure and liability on certain individuals." This especially became a problem when it came to the aspect of venue safety. "We were concerned

that our planned event was on the street. It wasn't a place where we could vet people walking through the door." Law enforcement was not a helpful partner either. "After going to the police and asking them how they could support us, they essentially said they didn't have the capacity."

Coming up against financial challenges and with few partners to lean on, the organizer and their team realized, "We were not able to afford private security and there was no non-profit willing to host this Pride event and take the liability and apply for insurance. We got to a point where we asked what the risk was." Ultimately, they made the difficult call to cancel the event and continue organizing in hopes of more success in the future.

MONITORING

Keeping tabs on the opposition is an important part of planning a successful Pride event in some situations. Monitor local anti-LGBTQIA2S+ activity, specifically as it relates to an upcoming event, to evaluate risks and understand oppositional messages and strategies. It can also help you gather documentation of threats, harassment, and intimidation that you may want to share with elected officials, media, and possibly even law enforcement.

However, monitoring the opposition can come with real challenges, from setting up clear reporting systems, to **protecting volunteers psychologically**. Inaccuracies in monitoring can lead to problems like over- or underestimating a potential concern, giving erroneous statements to the press, or

This organizer's key insight, in the eyes of our team at Western States Center, is that decisions about postponement or cancellation need to be made through the same values-based lens you use in other aspects of your organizing work. As they emphasized throughout their interview: "Our concern was for our youth and most vulnerable in our community." By centering the well-being of young LGBTQIA2S+ people, this organizer navigated difficult and heartbreaking choices, coming to a decision that they stand by to this day. We hope that your team will keep this lesson in mind as you do your work on behalf of your community.

difficulties in making realistic safety plans.

In Klamath, Courtney Neubauer set up a system to document information that Klamath Pride recorded in-house and received from community members: "We had a group of 3-4 people that were all adding to it and people could send us stuff. We had a Google Doc for screenshots." Klamath Pride's monitoring system extended to the day of the event as well, as Courtney shared: "We created day-of cards that had a number of where to call. We set up a Google Voice number and the person at home sat by her phone all day and walked through steps if you get harassed, [...] The person at home was ready to type in all the information and complaints." North Idaho Pride Alliance also benefited from setting up a committee to handle monitoring.

Beyond creating your own system for opposition monitoring, working directly with monitoring organizations can be helpful. Days ahead of a community vaccine clinic, Anne Johnson at Spectrum Center Spokane said, “We were receiving notifications regarding online chatter... saying ‘stop these people trying to murder our children.’” To get more clarity on where these discussions were taking place and how much attention the outlandish anti-vaccine claims were getting, Spectrum Center partnered with Western States Center to look into the issue and ensure that Spectrum Center understood who was attempting to target the event. This allowed Spectrum Center to plan ahead with their partner organizations and venue, ensuring a safe and successful event.


Creating clear guidelines for partners and community members to share information they see online or in person can also be beneficial. Many of WSC’s interviewees and partner organizations discussed receiving updates about bigoted activity from local allies. This type of grassroots network can be a vital source of information that can add capacity to your monitoring work. However, your allies will need guidance on how best to assist; many interviewees mentioned that as soon as potential harassment or violence at Pride events became a matter of public concern, their social media inboxes began to overflow with decontextualized social media screenshots, non-specific tips and concerns, and other information that became overwhelming.

Guidance to partners may include advice to share concerning information directly with Pride organizations and avoid amplifying anti-LGBTQIA2S+ messages publicly and spreading fear in the community. For example, in the weeks leading up to Coeur d’Alene Pride in the Park 2022, a video of a paramilitary leader advocating direct confrontation with Pride attendees went viral multiple times on various platforms — first on Twitter, then



TIPS FOR MONITORING

1. Documentation, and more importantly *systematic* documentation is key. For those organizing the Pride event, for media, and for law enforcement, having the receipts (documentation) is invaluable.
2. Systematic documentation can take the form of a simple spreadsheet that categorizes things such as the date of the post and where it occurred as well as the nature of it (a threat, disinformation, doxxing, etc) and, of course, a screenshot of the evidence. Your organization should accept any and all tips from the community members, but if they don’t include the aforementioned material or cannot be verified, they should be treated as unconfirmed rumors.
3. Create an agreement with your monitoring team to avoid amplifying the opposition publicly. Screenshots and information from your monitoring spreadsheet should not be shared online in ways that may spread fear.
4. For those engaged in the monitoring work, it is important to set boundaries and reporting guidelines. Work out a shift schedule for monitoring and set time limits so that volunteers use their time well and protect their mental health. Agree ahead of time what items in the monitoring should be flagged immediately for organizers, such as threats of violence, etc.



Monitoring can also be crucial in determining what messages and tactics anti-democracy groups are using and how much traction they are gaining.

nearly a month later, on TikTok. North Idaho Pride Alliance received an abundance of communications from community members and the press, often with the assumption that the video was brand new and NIPA was unaware of it. Jessica Mahuron, former outreach director for North Idaho Pride Alliance said, “We were handling a lot of hype, so we put out a press release acknowledging the issue but not going into details. We never wanted to give the opposition’s messaging a platform.” This functioned as an effective form of rumor control, providing a time-stamped and public response to the flood of social media warnings. After this experience, North Idaho Pride Alliance made sure that their public-facing messaging included explicit instructions to community members to send any troubling information to a specific email address.

Decisions about when or if to report threats to law enforcement can be thorny. Develop

clarity early on regarding your organization’s decision-making process and assessment of what kinds of threats rise to that level of concern for you. Many of our interviewees found that these questions were far from simple. “Trying to navigate where the line of an actionable threat is that is reportable to law enforcement and what they can do something about versus just noise [...] was a learning experience for me,” said Dr. Sarah Lynch, North Idaho Pride Alliance board member. Ali Koski shared that monitoring ahead of Silver Valley Pride “was helpful, because we were able to establish credibility with the law enforcement that we were paying attention to these things. And it allowed us to isolate who was active online, and then watch for them if they were coming to the event.”

Just as each Pride is different, so too are the anti-democracy activities they may face. In some situations, bigoted targeting can begin months ahead of time, as we saw in 2022 in Coeur d’Alene. However, a general rule of thumb is that as the event gets closer, things can start to heat up in unpredictable ways. Jessica Mahuron, former North Idaho Pride Alliance Outreach Director, told us that up until a few weeks before Pride in the Park, “we felt like we had it under control.” Donald Williamson watched the online chatter ahead of Boise Pride, but saw very little activity at first. “The analogy I used was that for about a week it was like somebody took coal from an old campfire and they threw it in the middle of a dry hay field, expecting it to catch fire... and it really didn’t. The story would smolder and smoke for like a day or two and then would just die out.”

Unfortunately, the attacks don’t always stay local. Some anti-democracy provocateurs or conspiracist media outlets have a nationwide following, and a mention of your event can drive local action. In Coeur d’Alene,

Jessica explained, “Where things went haywire is when you saw prominent white nationalists getting more involved... They created that media content and pushed it to national levels.” The actions of these provocateurs, in turn, led to an onslaught of local harassment in the final week before Pride: “They were calling every sponsor and vendor, even the small mom and pop craft artisans, and there was a big pressure campaign in all levels of government trying to shut down the event,” explained Jessica. This mirrors the experiences of nearly all our interviewees, who told us that targeting ramped up days before their events. For this reason, your team may be well served by intensifying monitoring during the final weeks before your event.

Monitoring can also be crucial in determining what messages and tactics anti-democracy groups are using and how much traction they are gaining. Is there a particular target that they are focused on, such as a community leader or sponsor? Are they attempting to spread disinformation about the event or your organizing team? In many cases, our interviewees noted that messaging from anti-democracy groups affected discussions about their events in venues like City Council meetings and on social media, even when local media avoided amplifying anti-LGBTQIA2S+ bigotry. By keeping an eye on anti-democracy messaging, organizers were able to gauge when they needed to mobilize their own supporters, craft coalition statements, and take other actions to shore up support for their work.

MEDIA

Media coverage can set expectations regarding Pride events, shift local culture toward inclusion, amplify pro-LGTBQ+ messages, and put pressure on elected leaders, so determining your approach to working with media is an early priority. The importance of working with media only increases in the face of organized attacks by bigoted groups, when anti-LGBTQIA2S+ targeting of events on social media and alternative news sites can suddenly arise and escalate. Having a media plan and guidelines in place offers organizers more control over the narrative and situation if this occurs.

➤ **Establish clear roles for speaking and coordinating with the press.**

Spokespeople can be anyone from your group’s board chair to a volunteer organizer, a business sponsor, a representative from a regional partner organization, or a community member willing to share their story. Statements can even be released from the organization itself rather than an individual if doxxing is a significant concern. When making this decision, have a conversation in advance about risk and precautions with the person taking on this role, and consider their individual identities and needs.



Raising awareness through the press can make your event safer by putting pressure on local government.

➤ **Assigning media spokespeople alleviates pressure from those organizing event logistics.**

Make sure everyone knows who the spokespeople are. That way, when an organizer is approached by an anti-LGBTQIA2S+ actor claiming to be a reporter, they can just ask for their contact information and say a spokesperson will be in touch.

➤ **Prepare talking points in advance, and stick with them. Consistent messaging is critical.**

➤ **Create your messages and outreach plan based on what audiences you hope to reach.**

For example, the first annual Pride in Wallace, Idaho did not receive advance press. But the local newspaper and a Spokane TV news station were present at the event, and produced positive event coverage. Ali Koski said, "The

grapevine in the queer community travels so much quicker than a newspaper article. Our efforts to promote on social media and hanging posters for visibility went further than a write-up in the press, that probably would have gotten us in front of the wrong people."

➤ **Raising awareness through the press can make your event safer by putting pressure on local government.**

Courtney Neubauer of Klamath Pride shared, "We wanted to close down traffic that directly went through the park because that would be the easiest place for a vehicular attack. At first, the city said no, so we went on a little press tour. That press tour was one of the most important things for security. I talked about our fears of the vehicular attack and how we hoped City Council makes the right choice because they're aware of these attacks."

➤ **Place boundaries on what news outlets your organization will engage.**

Research unfamiliar media outlets that approach your organization before consenting to an interview. It's okay to be selective with press inquiries, especially with media that may misreport, produce sensationalized content, or stoke cultural divides with biased reporting.

➤ **Protect people who might be harmed by media exposure.**

Anne Johnson of Spectrum Center Spokane shared that they didn't allow media in spaces where faces of young people could be filmed. "I don't want to see anyone get outed, even if they're out to their family. What if they're not out to the larger community?"

➤ **Consider writing a brief statement if your capacity is overwhelmed.**

After the arrest of 31 Patriot Front members attempting to cause a riot at Coeur d'Alene's Pride in the Park, North Idaho Pride Alliance was bombarded with calls, emails and social media messages from news agencies around the country and the world. Exhausted after their event and still handling safety concerns, NIPA posted a message celebrating the successful event and informing the media that they were taking a day of rest and would follow up as capacity allowed.

Finally, media coverage is an opportunity to share the celebratory, community spirit that drives Pride gatherings to exist. During an interview with a local radio station to promote Sandpoint Pride, organizers emphasized that they were "celebrating our resilience, our need for community, and we are here."



PART 2

During the Event

This should be the fun part! After all the hard work to prepare and rally community support, your team should feel confident in sticking with its safety plans during the event. Here are a few tips to make sure you don't forget:

1. Signage communicating safety agreements should be visibly posted at the venue.
2. Announcements made throughout the day by the emcee can ensure attendees know what safety resources exist and are reminded of relevant guidelines, such as a non-engagement policy if applicable.
3. Point persons for every facet of the event should be identifiable and acting in their roles: stage emcee, vendor manager, peacekeepers, police liaison, volunteer coordinator, activity leads, media spokespersons and so on. Crucially, each team member, including lead organizers, should only be assigned to one role at a time.
4. Volunteers, vendors, partners and performers should clearly understand their placement, roles, contact person and how to communicate if an issue arises.
5. Come to an agreement about day-of decision-making in advance. Identified decision-makers can be empowered by the group to act when the unexpected happens.
6. No matter how strong a plan is, leadership will need to use on-the-spot problem solving at some point during the event.

Pride organizers we interviewed reflected on how their planning came to fruition and what they did when unexpected situations arose.



“I would have liked to know beforehand that our Pride didn’t have to be perfect. In a lot of ways things didn’t go exactly to plan. But it was better than nothing, which is what everybody had before that. If it’s a smaller community, or just one person wants to host a small Pride, it’s better than nothing. The simple act of hanging up posters changed people’s lives and helped them feel seen.”

– ALI KOSKI, SILVER VALLEY PRIDE

“We had an outpouring of support, globally. I have probably a dozen or more new sponsors that want to be a part of this year’s festival. And at the end of the day, more good was gained.”

– DONALD WILLIAMSON,
BOISE PRIDE FESTIVAL


“We were downtown where everybody could see us and come. We stood strong. We created a family in Billings, and it now includes the Chamber of Commerce, the Mayor, the Zoo, and other 501c3 nonprofits. The Billings Clinic, Riverstone Health and United Way list us as partners now.”

– WALT DONGES, 406 PRIDE



“We had a security lead person [...] and volunteers posted at entrances. We asked volunteers to not get into a long narrative, just tell us where they are and describe the problematic person and our safety lead was there within a minute. The only weird incident was this one guy who had a complete freak-out meltdown when the drag show started. He was near the side of the stage and started screaming [and] moving toward the front of the stage where kids were sitting cross-legged on the ground. The owners of [the host business] had to intervene. [They] did a great job of calmly but firmly telling him he needed to go or they were going to call the police. It took us 20 min or so to get him to the sidewalk at the edge of the property. It wasn’t until the cops started driving up that he stepped off the property. Private property was the difference in terms of minimizing any potential problem.”

– ORGANIZER, SANDPOINT PRIDE



“We put a big sign right at the entrance that had a big megaphone with a NO cross on it that said do not engage. This is your Pride. Don’t engage with protesters.”

– ALI KOSKI,
SILVER VALLEY PRIDE

“I made sure our safety personnel in orange vests were monitoring and walking around and everybody was doing okay. They were there to help folks if they weren’t feeling safe and get them to a place where they could feel safe. I was very connected with the emcee for the day for announcements and to ensure it was audible from the stage. We made announcements to not engage, we know they are there. I had contact with all my safety monitors via the Signal app. I also had a direct text line with one of the police officers in case there was an escalation I couldn’t defuse... There was a cocoon of safety and love on the inside we were able to create and maintain for people who needed it.”

– DR. SARAH LYNCH,
NORTH IDAHO PRIDE ALLIANCE

“The one potential arrest I ended up intervening on was a trans woman who was being verbally attacked and went off on them for a minute and then the police started moving in. I intervened and said her name and that I had a popsicle with her name on it. I was running around so much, but I kept getting teared up because of the way that community showed up for this event. There is more good than bad, and there are more people who are loving. People in the community didn’t see us try to sweep anything under the rug. We weren’t trying to minimize the threats in any way. They saw that we had a security plan.”

– COURTNEY NEUBAUER,
KLAMATH PRIDE

“I think for a lot of straight folks, they wouldn’t assume that a queer organization is going to be the most likely to host a giant vaccination clinic, and especially not to make it a party. We wanted to tie into how we are looking at both upstream and downstream – the things that affect health and well being.”

– ANNE JOHNSON, SPECTRUM CENTER SPOKANE



PART 3

After the Event

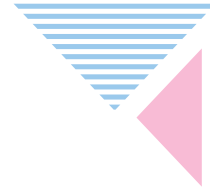
First and foremost – you did it! Congrats! After weeks or months of organizing, your team deserves to celebrate and relax. Post a thank you message for everyone involved (with photos!) while the event is still fresh in your mind. This is a simple way to broadcast your success to the community without having to rely on news outlets to provide positive coverage.

Immediately after the event, check in with your team members and create space to congratulate each other and process anything urgent that arose during the event. In the days following Pride, take a pause and give yourself some breathing room. If needed, place an automatic reply on your organization's email, social media messenger, and phone voice mail advising that your team is on a brief break and when you'll be available again.

Reinforcing Successes and Following Up

Remember to evaluate what happened with your team, especially while memories are still fresh. To build upon your team's success and strengthen future events, it's important to collect and assess feedback. Organizing a celebratory event debrief can help your coalition of community support stay engaged.

- Make sure to invite volunteers, partners, vendors and anyone else involved in your Pride event. A debrief event should take place in a relaxed and positive environment where people feel comfortable sharing their thoughts.
- Assign a facilitator to ensure everyone has an opportunity to speak, and a note-taker in charge of documenting feedback and next steps.
- Create an agenda that invites feedback on key event elements such as safety, venue, marketing, communication, food, schedule, stage performances and volunteer coordinating.
- For each part of the event, ask: What went right? What went wrong? What will we do better next time? What follow-up is needed?



**It's critical to remain connected
with your community coalition
because backlash can continue
after your event.**



- For those unable to join the debrief, consider creating an online survey. Including an option to submit feedback anonymously may also help you catch issues that people might not otherwise mention
- Make sure to store collected feedback in a safe place your team can access
- Review and discuss the feedback within your leadership team after the debrief
- Revisit and implement suggestions as you plan for future events
- If the event was successful, consider how your team can share positive feedback externally to advance broader goals

In addition to gathering feedback and building support for the following year, it's critical to remain connected with your community

coalition because backlash can continue after your event. If this occurs, your team should stay engaged with monitoring and documenting anything of concern. Provide public and behind the scenes support to any individuals or institutions that are targeted. Check back in with sponsors, vendors, performers and volunteers. Report out to your community supporters to keep lines of communication open.

After the Patriot Front arrests in Coeur d'Alene, anti-democracy groups spread a [doctored video](#) of a drag performer at Pride. And that wasn't the only incident that required the NIPA team to remain vigilant with monitoring and documentation efforts. Dr. Sarah Lynch shared, "I went home that day on Saturday thinking, okay, my job is done. We did it. We pulled it off. We had a safe event... On Sunday, I slept for 12 hours. Fast forward

to Monday, there was a release of this doctored video of one of the performers and the false accusations.”

Planning for Year-Round Success

Unfortunately, anti-democracy and bigoted groups remain active in our communities even after initial successful efforts to counter them. This is a time to consider what ongoing actions can be taken to build a stronger community that is better positioned to counter social movements that exploit bigotry and intolerance. Sustained, inclusive community organizing for justice is the most effective way to reduce political space for bigoted movements.

A major event can inspire momentum towards making your community more inclusive and welcoming, as well to ensure bigoted movements don't successfully build power in your region. Organizing for the long haul can look differently depending on the community. To start, here are a few ideas:


- Host smaller, intentional events throughout the year that foster belonging and connection. These don't have to be costly or time-consuming. Think coffee chats, book clubs, potlucks, movie or game nights. Social opportunities like these strengthen existing relationships and provide entry for new volunteers and supporters.
- Form a year-round group of advocates committed to being informed and involved in local matters and civic life. This can involve showing up in spaces like public meetings, writing letters to the editor, encouraging participation in elections, or seeking representation on boards and committees.

- Work to shift local culture by creating opportunities to engage with art, music, performance and storytelling. Uplift local artists and diverse voices as a vehicle for base building and power building in non-traditional social change spaces. Examples could be open-mic nights, podcasts, featuring queer artists on your social media pages or partnering with local arts organizations.

- Continue to build partnerships with businesses and nonprofits, offering resources and contacts whenever possible. Maintain a network of volunteers to help open doors throughout the community and encourage visible support.

Most importantly, create opportunities to gather input from the community on what they would like to see happen, and invite them to participate in creating the changes they hope to see.

We thank the Pride organizers who contributed to this guide by sharing their stories and perspectives. Organizers expressed remarkable resilience and hope for the momentum building in their communities, despite all the challenges they faced.



“You have to pace yourself and recognize these changes don’t happen overnight. It is one’s life’s work to be committed to anti-racism, to justice.”

– ORGANIZER, SANDPOINT PRIDE

“[Klamath Pride] isn’t a well-operated or fine-tuned machine with a lot of money behind it. It’s a group of people who saw a need and wanted to do something good in the community.”

– COURTNEY NEUBAUER,
KLAMATH PRIDE

“We knew that change was happening in this valley. It’s just this idea that we’ve started one little ripple of change in a place where people felt invisible.”


– ALI KOSKI,
SILVER VALLEY PRIDE ORGANIZER

“If those folks that are feeling a little oppressed see someone standing up and doing what they need to do to move us forward. They don’t always come in ahead of me, but they’ll come in behind me.”

– WALT DONGES,
406 PRIDE BOARD PRESIDENT

“Events are important, but we need to be doing more as an organization year-round. Whether that’s events, outreach, or resources.”

– DONALD WILLIAMSON,
BOISE PRIDE FESTIVAL





THANK YOU TO THESE COMMUNITIES THAT CONTRIBUTED INTERVIEWS FOR THIS GUIDE

406 Pride | Billings, MT | 406pride.org

Boise Pride | Boise, ID | boisepridefest.org

Klamath Pride | Klamath Falls, OR | [“Huge turnout for 2nd Annual Klamath Pride Festival”](#)

North Idaho Pride Alliance | Coeur d’Alene, ID | nipridealliance.com

Sandpoint Pride Festival | Sandpoint, ID | sandpointpride.com

Silver Valley Pride | Wallace, ID | [“Wallace celebrates first Silver Valley Pride”](#)

Spectrum Center Spokane | Spokane, WA | spectrumcenterspokane.org

And special thanks to the anonymous organizer who shared their insights on the complexities of canceling an event.

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