

BRIEFING FOR THE OHIO PHILANTHROPIC COMMUNITY

Subject: Understanding and responding to the needs of Ohio's local LGBTQ communities post-Orlando

Summary

- The Orlando mass shooting has ongoing implications for individuals and organizations comprising Ohio's LGBTQ community
- Acknowledgment of the impact and opportunities to connect with others are critical to the healing process, but may be difficult to find for many LGBTQ Ohioans
- The aftermath of Orlando continues to strain the capacities of local LGBTQ organizations and leaders
- Funders can support local LGBTQ communities by providing resources to build and strengthen infrastructure

Background

Early this summer, LGBTQ communities across the nation were painfully reminded of the many challenges that remain. On June 12, 2016, Pulse, an LGBTQ nightclub, was attacked on Latin night during Pride Month. The massacre claimed 49 lives and wounded 53 others, nearly all of them LGBTQ and Latinx young adults. Many in the philanthropic sector have sought information about opportunities to support Orlando. The national philanthropy affinity group, [Funders for LGBTQ Issues](#), released both a [statement](#) and [resource guide](#) with recommendations for grantmakers interested in supporting the Orlando community. A number of funders across the country have since directed funds to Orlando, launched community fundraising efforts, and made statements in support of the Orlando LGBTQ community and LGBTQ people generally.

In March of this year, Funders for LGBTQ Issues announced a new targeted, place-based effort to increase the dialogue about foundation funding for LGBTQ people living in Ohio, naming Kristi Andrasik of the Cleveland Foundation and Brian Schultz of Foundation Center Midwest as the inaugural Ohio LGBTQ Funding Ambassadors. Less than three months into our new role as Ohio LGBTQ Funding Ambassadors, we found ourselves working to maintain focus on the needs of Ohio's LGBTQ community while grappling to comprehend the horrific crime committed against our community in Orlando. Since June 12, we have been in communication with LGBTQ colleagues, LGBTQ-serving organizations, and local funders to understand the impact of Orlando and offer support; yet we know there are still many with whom we have not yet connected, and many who may not yet know that we exist as a local resource. After convening Northeast Ohio LGBTQ nonprofit leaders to gain a deeper insight into the local impact of Orlando, the issues most important for local funders to be aware of, and the opportunities for local funders to respond, we have compiled the following briefing for Ohio's philanthropic community.

Issue - How Has Orlando Impacted LGBTQ Ohioans?

The June 12 massacre in Orlando has had wide-reaching implications – impacting LGBTQ communities everywhere. While the nation's attention has appropriately been focused on supporting communities in Orlando, pain, fear, confusion, and grief continues to grip many LGBTQ individuals here in Ohio.

- Opportunities to process this tragedy and collectively grieve with other LGBTQ individuals may be difficult to come by for many Ohioans. Ohio does not protect LGBTQ residents from discrimination

in employment, housing, or public accommodations. Isolation may result from a lack of such protections, as LGBTQ Ohioans may fear coming out at work or being out among their neighbors. LGBTQ bars and nightclubs have traditionally served as a respite for many LGBTQ people - a place to gather, connect with each other, share experiences of both joy and grief, talk openly, and find the sense of community that can be difficult or even unsafe to seek out in one's workplace, school, or neighborhood. The role of these establishments may be particularly important for LGBTQ individuals living in cities without large, visible LGBTQ populations or strong LGBTQ-serving organizations. For some members of the LGBTQ community, the violence in Orlando has shifted the meaning of LGBTQ bars from a safe inclusive space to one associated with fear and trauma. This combination of factors means many LGBTQ Ohioans may be experiencing severe isolation at a time when collective community support is most critical.

- Lack of direct acknowledgement by schools, employers, and social networks has left many LGBTQ people struggling with a sense of erasure. Many people of color within the LGBTQ community are particularly struggling with the lack of acknowledgement by local leaders that most of the victims of the mass murder in Orlando were LGBTQ people of color. This is a population whose experiences often remain invisible. Once again, this problem may be especially pronounced in parts of Ohio that do not have a large visible LGBTQ community or strong LGBTQ-serving organizations.
- The spike in Islamophobia and anti-Muslim rhetoric that occurred after Orlando, the ongoing issue of police brutality directed towards Black Americans, and the recent targeted murders of police officers are incidents of intolerance, hate, oppression, and violence which are not discretely experienced by groups of people separate from LGBTQ people. LGBTQ people are also Muslim, are also Black, are also police officers, etc.; therefore, many LGBTQ Ohioans are experiencing complex grief and re-traumatization.

Considerations – How has Orlando impacted local LGBTQ Organizations?

Anytime anything happens related to the LGBTQ community, whether it is positive or negative, local or national, LGBTQ organizations are called upon by community members, media, policymakers, and businesses to respond with leadership, insight, and support. Convening the leaders of the LGBTQ Community Center of Greater Cleveland, Equality Ohio, and Plexus Chamber of Commerce to learn what effect the Orlando massacre has had on their organizations, a common theme quickly emerged: the crisis in Orlando has put a strain on the capacity and resources of LGBTQ-serving organizations right here in Ohio.

The mass murder in Orlando brought a host of complex, intersecting issues to the doorsteps of LGBTQ organizations everywhere. Both in the immediate wake of the violence and the weeks that have followed, LGBTQ organizations have been operating in a rapidly shifting environment of new and increasingly intense demands. LGBTQ organizations have been called upon to respond to issues not just of homophobia, hate crimes, and violence, but are also navigating complex issues of race, Islamophobia, gun control, and terrorism. Our local organizations are continuing to work at maximum capacity to respond to media requests, brief local policymakers, provide resources to businesses/employers, and support local members of the LGBTQ community who are experiencing fear, isolation, re-traumatization and complex grief.

Many of us who are members of the LGBTQ community, as well as our deeply involved allies, were shaken to our very cores by the violence inflicted on our LGBTQ family. We may have continued to go to work in the days and weeks that followed, but many found and are still finding ourselves struggling to get through our usual tasks. The staff, board members, and volunteers of the local LGBTQ organizations who are called upon to tend to a grieving community must do so while also coping with their own response to this tragedy.

Some specific insights shared by local leaders:

- [LGBTQ Community Center of Greater Cleveland](#): experienced a sharp increase in drop-ins and phone calls immediately after Orlando, brought in trained volunteers and partner organizations to provide on-site crisis counseling to community members as well as support for staff. Clients, community members, and staff expressed increased concerns about safety and security. Media requests, inquiries from individuals wanting to “do something”, as well as calls from organizations and businesses planning events or fundraisers in honor of Orlando are continuing to come in. Capacity-building needs include:
 - Reaching the Latinx community, Muslim community, and other underserved populations - expanding culturally competent/relevant services, adding multilingual staff, etc.
 - Supporting LGBTQ people who don’t come to the Center’s physical space - finding and reaching out to other community organizations where LGBTQ youth gather; finding ways to create a sense of community for LGBTQ adults who may be less visible
 - Responding to questions about violence, gun control, police brutality
 - Providing safe zone trainings and special support to local social service providers (ie: behavioral health/counseling centers, domestic violence orgs, etc.) and schools/universities to equip them to better serve LGBTQ clients and students who may be experiencing increased distress and trauma-triggers.
- [Equality Ohio](#): communications became top priority with a need for rapid and well-informed responses to express solidarity with the Muslim community and denounce anti-Muslim hate speech, quickly followed by questions about gun control. Equality Ohio has been working with local, state, and national partners to respond to emerging issues while continuing to maintain public attention on the ongoing local/state policy issues that impact safety and acceptance for LGBTQ Ohioans. Capacity-building needs include:
 - Expanding communications resources to monitor local, state, and national trends, keep Ohio residents informed on complex issues, ensure Ohioans’ experiences are communicated to national partners, respond to increased media requests, etc.
 - Increasing local on-the-ground presence across the state to ensure local residents and organizations have direct access to Equality Ohio resources and support, and to ensure Equality Ohio’s efforts are continually informed by the unique experiences and needs of LGBTQ residents in all parts of the state
 - Keeping pace with the spike in inquiries from policymakers across the state by providing direct access to Equality Ohio staff
- [Plexus Chamber of Commerce](#): fielded inquiries from local and national partners expressing solidarity and seeking guidance on how to help support the community. With a strategic planning process currently underway, new questions arose regarding the role of a chamber of commerce in responding to a crisis in the community, how/when to activate the chamber in a crisis, and how best to support members/partners. Opportunities for capacity-building:
 - Reaching out to LGBTQ-owned or LGBTQ-centric businesses (particularly bars/nightclubs) to offer support for navigating less familiar situations such as responding to media inquiries and addressing safety/security
 - Providing direct workplace support for LGBTQ employees, including reaching those who may not be out or visible in their workplace
 - Developing and providing timely communications to businesses, corporations, and LGBTQ Employee Resource Groups regarding best practices for supporting LGBTQ employees
 - Helping businesses develop safety plans and crisis communication plans

Recommendations - What Local Funders Can Do

- Fund infrastructure. The tragedy in Orlando has underscored the lack of infrastructure in many LGBTQ communities. Funders can help support LGBTQ communities through grantmaking aimed at strengthening and expanding local infrastructure and collaborations.
- Check in with local LGBTQ leaders. Express your support for the leader, acknowledging this as an especially difficult time. Let them know their work is valued. Seek their insight regarding the impact Orlando has had on your local community and what role place-based funders can play to support the community.
- Check in with local social services organizations which are not LGBTQ-specific to see if and how they are supporting their LGBTQ clients, employees, etc. Fund cultural competency efforts such as [Safe Zone trainings](#).
- Make statements of support that clearly and specifically acknowledge the LGBTQ community in the geographic areas your foundation supports.
- Educate yourself and your staff about the LGBTQ community in Ohio by conducting site visits and informational meetings with community members, and by attending the [LGBTQ Funders Immersion Trip](#) in Cleveland Ohio on September 8-9, 2016.
- Reach out to your Ohio LGBTQ Funding Ambassadors any time for questions, support, and resources.

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