COVID-19: How to communicate clearly as an LGBTI group

[Blog](#), [Communications](#), [Community Organising](#), [Strategic Communications](#)

The COVID-19 crisis situation is changing every day, and as an LGBTI organisation you are going to want to keep your audience updated about what specifically matters to them. ILGA-Europe's strategic communications consultant, Sho Konno, gives his key advice for communicating at this time.

As the situation with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) develops on a daily basis, one of the most important tasks for any LGBTI group is to communicate with our community and other audiences. This guide is about how to take those first steps for your initial communication, and where to get more support afterwards, as clear communication will be needed regularly through this crisis.

Please note: this is not a guide about how to make decisions or adapt your activities during the COVID-19 crisis ([click here for our tips on 'rethinking 2020 for activist organisations](#)). Rather it's a guide about how to clearly communicate the decisions you've made and the activities you have become engaged in during this time.

1. Be brief

- **Give a snapshot of what you are going to tell us**. Does the title of your post just say 'COVID-19 info' or does it tell us what that info is about? Does the first line of your email tell us what is in the rest of the email? It's important to give people a clear snapshot of what you are going to say.
- **What's new and what do we need to know first?** If someone doesn't scroll down, will they see your main message? Health and safety generally goes first.
- **Be specific about and for the LGBTI community**. Your audience is not expecting you to replicate general advice from the government to everybody. Unless you are prevented by specific threats, address lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people explicitly with the specific messages you have for them and their communities.
- **What kind of updates will you give and where can we find them?** It is sadly unlikely you will only have to communicate once, so set the expectation now that you will give regular updates, and tell people where they can find them.

2. Focus on the facts

- **Give specific directions based on the local health guidance.** Do not assume everybody is watching the news as much as you are, always link to the official guidance and then explain what that means for your context.
- **Tell people what you do not know yet**. Do not be tempted to think 'we haven't decided this yet so let's just leave it out'. It is better to at least acknowledge that something is important to your audience but you do not have details yet, and that you will update them.
- **Put a date on it.** If it is a web page, for instance, it might be read at a later date. With a daily changing situation, it's important to clearly date your communication, so people are clear whether it's up-to-date.
- **Don't over-promise**. For example, saying that every activity will happen "after things go back to normal" or

will be transferred online may set false expectations. If you communicate your hopes but do not make promises, your audience should understand.

- **Be clear why they should click on links.** Linking to other resources is good, but if you are sending people to other sites then give them a quick explanation of what you are recommending in it. Don't pass the work to your audience.

3. Stay human

- **Talk about 'we' and 'us'.** You do this work and your audience supports you because of solidarity and a desire to fight for people. This is as good a time as any to simply say that and remind yourself and your audience about our shared purpose.
- **It's okay to say things are difficult.** Whether it is funding, logistics or your team's own health, do not feel like you have to 'appear strong'. Recognising challenges and saying how you hope to deal with them is what true resilience looks like. Your audience will empathise and may have ideas of how to help.
- **A personal touch is great.** You are a human writing this communication, so allow yourself to include a bit of your personality or humour, like [this LGBT foundation, which added a message of trans rights to hand-washing advice.](#)

4. Test it from your audience's perspective

- **Get at least one person who did not make the draft to read the draft.** Taking different perspectives on board can lead to clearer content.
- **Imagine what steps your audience has to take.** You are focusing on drafting the web page, but how do they get to it? What if they actually first find you through your website's homepage, the voicemail on your office phones, or the description text on your Twitter/Instagram bio? And how are you proactively making sure it reaches the people who need to see it?
- **Repeat one core message, even if you change the details**. You may have updates to your webpage in future, or specific announcements to make on social media, but remember that for some of your audience this will be the first message they see, so try to always include a repetition or link to your original core message. And if you change that core message, update it in case someone only sees the first message (also see 'Put a date on it' earlier).

Here is a good example of COVID-19 communication from a small organisation:

ILGA
EUROPE

Equality and human rights for LGBTI
in Europe and Central Asia

GAYLORD AND
DOROTHY DONNELLEY
FOUNDATION

Dear friends –

We recognize that the COVID-19 situation is changing rapidly, and in this time of uncertainly, wanted to share our current plans:

- In order to minimize contact between people, our Chicago and Charleston offices are closed starting Monday, March 16. Staff will be working remotely, with access to email and voicemail.
- In-person gatherings are postponed, cancelled, or moved to a virtual space for the foreseeable future. If you are a participant in one of those, you will hear from a staff member directly.
- Proposals & reports due March 27th are now **due April 10th**.
- If we provided sponsorship or paid attendance for a conference or event that is cancelled, we will not request a refund.
- We will post updates here - **https://gddf.org/covid19** - and on social media. Any major changes will be sent via this newsletter.

We value the relationships we have with you, and our virtual lines of communication remain open for conversation.

We wish you and your community health and peace of mind.

Sincerely,

David Farren, Executive Director

Our COVID-19 Updates

What makes it good?

- It's very short! Bullet points help our eyes to scan it quickly.
- There is specific direction on how the local official health guidance relates to their activities.
- It tells people what they probably want to know most urgently ('Do I still have to submit by the deadline?', 'Do I have to give a refund for the cancelled event?')
- It tells people where to get updates and how to keep in contact.
- It still includes a human message, but at the end, instead of a long philosophical piece of writing that you have to read past to get to the details.

What could be better

- The 'COVID-19 Updates' webpage that this newsletter links to lists all updates chronologically. This is helpful if someone returns to the page, but what if someone is reading it for the first time? Try to make sure any 'COVID-19' message or link has your main message summarised or linked to right at the top.

Maybe we will go 'back to normal' soon, but we should be prepared for a 'new normal' for potentially months to come. After you have made your initial communication, you can set up processes and strategies that will prepare you better for this crisis and other crises in future. Here are some resources that will be helpful in the longer run:

- A coronavirus crisis comms best practice guide (Prosper Strategies) Includes risk assessment, internal comms, and stakeholder/employee/services communication.
- Crisis comms for charities (Charity Comms) A more general guide with practical steps for preparing for future crises, especially ones that affect your reputation.
- Dealing with disinformation (Blueprints for Change) A crowd-sourced Google Doc with the latest tips from campaigns facing deliberate disinformation.