LGBTI Activism 101: Connecting with the Media

Blog, Communications, Strategic Communications

> It's important that the media explores the issues that affect our communities in a realistic way, but for many LGBTI activists, getting journalists interested can seem difficult, if not impossible. Our latest activism Skills Boost sessions explored connecting to the media. Here's what our participants learned.

All LGBTI activists know that communication is power. It is a crucial tool for making change to advance our rights. But, with so many things happening in the world, getting the real issues that LGBTI people face into the headlines can prove difficult, especially since journalists are only interested in certain stories about our communities, like sudden tragedies or new anti-LGBTI laws.

As part of our current Strategic Communications programme, our latest Skills Boost sessions focused on media relations. The worldwide media not only brings us daily news but also sets the agenda and frames the narrative about LGBTI people and rights. Journalists and editors are the ones who ultimately decide what stories are told, and which ones are left out.

So, to get stories that aren't headline-grabbing out there, building a good relationship with journalists is vital for activists. However, the ever-changing media landscape, activist workloads, juggling advocacy and community needs, and emergencies that arise so often, make it difficult for activists to connect, and stay connected with media representatives.

As part of the Skills Boost, ILGA-Europe's media officer, Ana Muñoz walked participants through a part of her daily routine. Here are some of the good practices Ana has learnt over the past three years in the job, which might help you step up your media game.

Daily news-skim

Start your day going through the news to have a sense of what is going on in the world and in your communities and locality. This doesn't mean you have to read all the news. Subscribe to newsletters that are relevant to you and your work and set up alerts to monitor news about LGBTI rights, both across the region and in your country and locality. Also set up alerts for mentions of your organisation. There are paid tools to monitor the news, but there are also free options like Google Alerts. Curate your social media feeds so they show you what you need to see and what is useful for your work. For example, make sure you follow on Twitter (or Mastodon!) the journalists and media outlets that are right for you, so you can stay on top of the news and understand what gets journalists' attention.

Share what you pick up

Once you've scanned and spotted news items that are relevant to your organisation, you should share them with your colleagues across the organisation. A decade ago, you may have delivered a daily or weekly news clipping report but now there are platforms that allow you to share links in an immediate but organised manner. At ILGA-Europe we use a cross-organisational communications tool called Slack, which is either discounted or free for not-for-profits. But you can share the headlines and links on email, if you prefer. Sharing daily updates ensures that

your teams stay on top on things and can evaluate possible responses to the media in advance.

Talk to journalists

Journalists are real people too, and they need stories to keep them in business. Like all human beings, they also make mistakes. If you see a typo in your organisation's name (this happens with ILGA-Europe regularly), take it as an opportunity to introduce yourself and the work you do. See something misreported, inaccurate data or a quote you gave out of reported out of context? Email the journalist and tell them about it, in a polite way. Journalists usually appreciate feedback so they can do their jobs better, but they also like to receive feedback that is constructive rather than simply a complaint. Moreover, they will be happy to enlarge their list of contacts!

Create a media database

You will have many first conversations with journalists, the hard part is to maintain those relations. To prevent your relations disappearing into thin air, build a database and update it regularly. Keep in contact with those journalists when stories arise that you think they may be interested in, sending them a paragraph pitch. Or send them your press releases. Whether it is through a fancy mailing tool (which can be expensive) or a simple excel spreadsheet or mailing group on email, make sure to note down those names and emails. If you make a good connection with a journalist, ask them to let you know if they are moving on to another publication. (Journalists move all the time.) That way you will begin to have a way of figuring out who moves where.

Scan the horizon

If you read the news to understand what has just happened, horizon scanning techniques give you an insight of what is coming next. Bookmark anniversaries of important LGBTI-related events in your country, keep an eye on international days coming up, and gain access to journalists' and parliamentarians 'forward planners'. For example, here you can check the European Parliament's agenda of the week. The launch of official statistics about LGBTI people and issues, such as the ILGA-Europe Rainbow Map, or TGEU trans rights map might be interesting for your media and communications strategies too. Knowing things in advance enables you to prepare accordingly. For example, journalists may be interested in speaking to LGBTI couples on the anniversary of marriage equality in your country. You can make horizon scanning a regular agenda point in your monthly meetings.

Watch our Skills Boost session on Media Relations now!

If you are an LGBTI activist in Europe and Central Asia, join our private communications support group on Facebook where the idea for this Skills Boost came up in the first place, and where every week activists and ILGA-Europe staff discuss videos, social media, narrative, and other communications challenges. Remember you can also join The Hub, ILGA-Europe's LGBTI resource-sharing centre, which has lots of resources for effective communications.