

straight FOR equalitySM



Straight for Equality is a project of Parents, Families
and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) National.

A PFLAG Field Guide



straight

FOR

equalitySM

A PFLAG Field Guide

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About this booklet:

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welcome.

Imagine the time in your life before equality for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) people became personal to you. For many PFLAG members, it usually goes back to the time prior to finding out that someone that they love – whether a child, sibling, or other relative – is not straight. Many of these people may have thought about “gay rights” and even felt that fairness for GLBT people should exist, but never saw themselves as part of a movement to make it happen.

Of course, as every PFLAG parent knows, finding out someone you love is GLBT changes everything.

Remember your coming out process. Whether it was as a parent, grandparent or sibling of a GLBT person or as GLBT yourself, there were certain feelings you experienced. Remember how nervous you were, how concerned you were about other people’s reactions, and how you didn’t always know exactly what to say. For most people, their first step wasn’t lobbying on Capitol Hill or responding to a PFLAG Action Alert. It was having cautious conversations with family, friends, and co-workers about your experience. For most of you, PFLAG was there to make those conversations a little bit easier.

Straight for Equality, PFLAG’s newest project, aims to reach out to people who don’t have a close family connection to the issue of GLBT equality, but who want to help. For them, Straight for Equality will be an invitation to our movement and a chance to get the tools they need to become supportive. It will also help them navigate their own coming out process as straight allies. For PFLAGers, remembering those days “before you knew” or the stress of the coming out process will be key to creating an environment that is welcoming to these new members of our family.

At PFLAG we know that there are many straight people that support GLBT equality, but don’t know how to express their support...or even know if it is welcome. And there are even other potential allies who are willing to support GLBT equality, but feel that they need access to more information before speaking up. Through Straight for Equality we hope to let all of these straight people know that their support of

the GLBT community is welcome and encouraged. The GLBT community cannot achieve equality without the support of dedicated straight allies.

Most PFLAGers are straight allies by definition. However, the group that we're trying to reach out to are a different variety of straight allies – these are people who, unlike the “traditional” PFLAG member, don't have an immediate family member who is GLBT. Their connection could be through friends, acquaintances, or coworkers.

We hope that two different kinds of straight allies will benefit from Straight for Equality: existing straight allies seeking a network of support – perhaps some who are already within our membership and hope to make more connections – and potential allies who may not have ever considered getting involved with GLBT issues, but are ready to take action.

Through the Straight for Equality project, we hope to break down the barriers that keep people from getting involved. By creating a forum for straight people to openly discuss their questions and concerns, we hope to help them in becoming or growing as effective allies of the GLBT community. (Remember how helpful your first PFLAG meetings were when you knew you could ask anything and not be judged? That's what we hope for here.)

Straight for Equality will also provide specific recommendations to help transform attitudes and perceptions about GLBT people. We know that perceptions and ideas don't change overnight, so we're in this for the long haul, helping people change their outlooks and actions in steps that they're comfortable with.

In the same way that any PFLAGer can tell you how great it feels to “connect” with a new member and how that strengthens their commitment to our work, we hope that when new allies see how their own actions help move equality forward and change other people's ideas, they'll want to expand their influence. We will assist allies in encouraging their friends, family members, coworkers, and community members to embrace this goal and effect real and lasting change. Straight allies will learn the impact that they can have on other people when leading by example.

Straight for Equality will work to show that simple everyday contributions can make significant differences in advancing GLBT equality. By providing allies with simple tools, we hope they'll see how actions in their everyday lives can help the GLBT community.

As we look to the future at PFLAG, Straight for Equality is the next step in moving equality forward. PFLAG is already perceived as the “straight voice” in the GLBT movement that welcomes a broad base of people from different places, political affiliations, ethnic backgrounds, and generations, and we hope that Straight for Equality will also embody that diversity. Given PFLAG’s history and achievements, we are the only national organization with the support, capacity, and brand to make a program like Straight for Equality a successful venture...and we’re glad you’re about to be part of it.

John R. Cepek
PFLAG National President

Jody M. Huckaby
PFLAG Executive Director

1.

A Few Notes...

Get your mindset straight (sorry!) before you get started.

After learning more about what Straight for Equality is, it is important to also clarify what Straight for Equality is not. Making this important distinction can help your chapter to better understand the mission of the project and how you can integrate it into your chapter. What you'll find in this book are only the first of many opportunities for chapters to work with Straight for Equality to help make their work stronger. PFLAG chapters have a tremendous role in making this project successful, so here are a few things to keep in mind as you learn more about Straight for Equality.

- ✦ **Straight for Equality is not about getting people to your local PFLAG support meeting.** Chapters will be excited to reach out to and work with a new demographic of people they may not have targeted before, but it is important to keep in mind how these people are different from a “regular” PFLAGer, because their needs are different. While many who come to PFLAG meetings need support to help in the coming out process, most straight allies aren't in this position. However, by using some of the suggestions in this book, you can incorporate these new allies in your programs and activities.
- ✦ **Straight for Equality is not about overt advocacy.** Remember when you first started becoming involved in PFLAG? For many, getting support and becoming informed about the issues was the primary focus. Eventually, most PFLAG members do become advocates for fair legislation, but this isn't the place they start. The same is true for many allies. By learning about GLBT issues, speaking up, and taking small steps in their everyday lives, straight allies will be making a difference in the world around them. If and when they're ready to learn more about legislation, PFLAG is here to provide guidance. But getting involved in advocacy is a journey that takes time. As we have learned in our chapters with new parents and newly out GLBT people, you must meet people where they are and move them slowly towards advocacy so as not to scare them away.
- ✦ **Straight for Equality is not about making people feel guilty.** We all know how powerful guilt can be to get people to act, but this is not the time to use it. It may be tempting (and accurate) to point out to straight allies their “heterosexual privilege” and the “political scapegoating” that GLBT people face at the hands of a “heterocentric” society, but these are not convincing arguments,

and can be intimidating and turn potential allies off to your important messages. Making potential allies feel bad is not the same as making them feel empowered. The goal of Straight for Equality is to empower straight people and invite them to get involved. There are many great reasons for straight people to get involved that do not include making them feel guilty about the actions of others. Tell your story, share commonalities, and persuade people through positive support.

Just like a person walking into a PFLAG meeting for the first time, allies coming into Straight for Equality will be at different levels of understanding, involvement, and even comfort. Creating a supportive home for them – no matter where they are in their journey or what their goals may be – is a critical function of PFLAG chapters everywhere. Meeting people where they are, both literally and figuratively, is a key component in helping them grow.

While the simplest steps of Straight for Equality may seem like a big leap for some, other people will be much farther along from the start. Some people may want to attend PFLAG meetings and get involved in advocacy right away and that is great! We ask that you welcome these people into your PFLAG families and appreciate that like all families, each member has a unique role. Make sure that they know that they are appreciated and that they too have a home in PFLAG.

Now that you've learned more about what Straight for Equality is (and isn't), let's move on to how your PFLAG chapter can use Straight for Equality.

2.

**What can
my chapter
do with
Straight for
Equality?**

An excellent question. We've got answers.

Now that you have learned about what Straight for Equality is, you're probably wondering what this means for your chapter. Given that it isn't about getting people to a regular support group, how can it apply to you? And if you're not going to bring them to your lobby day right away, why spend the time?

We've got some good ways that you can make Straight for Equality work for your chapter.

Our chapters are the heart and soul of PFLAG, so no project would be complete without involvement at the chapter level. We hope that Straight for Equality will provide a new and exciting perspective to our chapters.

For chapters, Straight for Equality can be a great capacity-building tool. There are many ways that Straight for Equality can revitalize or strengthen your chapter. Straight for Equality will help many chapters think differently about the strength and presence of straight allies in the community and how best to welcome and work with them.

This toolkit provides information on three different ways that your chapter can use Straight for Equality: chapter programs, chapter speakers bureau, and coalition building.

Chapter Programs

Chapters are always looking for new and easy ideas to provide engaging programs at their meetings. In this section, we'll provide a pre-planned guide for a Straight for Equality chapter program to be held in conjunction with your chapter meeting. In addition to a schedule of events and a step-by-step guide for the program, you'll also find tips on how to ask people to be allies and how to challenge your membership to reach out to other potential allies in their lives.

Speakers Bureaus

Straight for Equality is a great tool for strengthening your existing speakers bureau or helping get one started. Because new allies have no direct "connection" to GLBT equality in the same way that a family member does, their perspective is different and may help you get in to speak at places that you may not have in the past. This section will provide suggestions on good ways for allies to

tell their stories with some suggested topics and points. It also includes materials such as a sample letter to invite your chapter to speak as well as a list of materials and other resources that will help prepare you for the event.

Coalition Building

Chapters will also benefit by using Straight for Equality to help build coalitions. Many chapters already have powerful community coalitions that they work with to help create change where they live. Straight for Equality will provide an opportunity to reach out to groups that your chapter may not have worked with before so you can expand your base. Straight for Equality can help bridge the gap between your work and the work of different groups. This section will help you brainstorm what other groups in your community there are to reach out to, offer a sample letter to get conversations started, and give you tips on how to “make the ask”.

This toolkit includes just three ways you can start using Straight for Equality to expand the reach of your work. Obviously, the possibilities are endless so this is just the beginning of many great opportunities for your chapter. Let’s get started...

3.

Chapter meeting programs with Straight for Equality

Spice up your monthly meetings with some ally talk.

Interesting chapter programs are an important tool to keeping your membership energized after years of involvement. Many people come to PFLAG for support, but stay for the education and advocacy opportunities. Keeping program ideas fresh and chapter members engaged can be a challenge. With all of the great work chapters do, sometimes it feels like a monthly struggle to develop programming for meetings. So what better way to get members interested in Straight for Equality and learning to engage more allies than with a chapter program? The program that's outlined here will fill a chapter's usual programming time (about an hour).

Below is a sample timeline for the meeting. We understand that PFLAG chapters work with many different meeting structures (some have support first, some save it for after the program); so please use this as a guide and change it if needed to fit your meeting structure.

Timeline of events for the meeting:

- ✓ Support Meeting (1 hour)
Conduct your standard monthly support meeting
- ✓ Straight for Equality Activity (20 minutes)
- ✓ Talk About Allies' Needs (25 minutes)
- ✓ Introduce Straight for Equality (15 minutes)

Here's a topic that can help start a discussion about what the needs of allies and potential allies are and how we can help fill these needs:

One of the most important (and often forgotten) steps in engaging potential straight allies is actually *asking* them to get involved. It may seem simple, but it is too crucial a point to skip. But do we know how to do it?

Most PFLAGers came to PFLAG because they were looking for support – in other words, they had a specific need that eventually helped them see their role in achieving GLBT equality. However, straight allies don't often have a need that drives them to get involved in a specific group, and often don't feel that they have a role in equality issues. Many straight people worry that others will not understand why they would want to be involved. Some even fear that they will be labeled as GLBT themselves. These are all barriers that can keep potential allies from joining in.

PFLAGers can demonstrate that there is a place for straight allies in the GLBT movement. Many of us have “been there” and can acknowledge that these concerns are real. Although there are many straight allies already involved, they are still in the minority in the GLBT movement.

One of the most powerful ways to overcoming these barriers is something PFLAGers can and should do: Asking. When we ask people to be allies and supportive of GLBT people, we send a signal that it is ok for them to get involved and care about these issues...and that PFLAG is here to help them learn more, face their barriers, and overcome them.

Conversation practice: Ask! (20 minutes)

For this activity, members will be practicing how to have these conversations with potential straight allies. We understand that these conversations can be intimidating, so we encourage you to practice to make yourselves more comfortable with it.

Start by asking members to pair off into twos. Try to encourage members to pair off with someone they don't know or would like to get to know better. One person will play the role of “potential straight ally” and the other will be the “already engaged and excited straight ally” – a role that PFLAGers certainly know!

The already-involved ally will try asking the potential straight ally to be supportive of GLBT people and to check out the Straight for Equality website (www.straightforequality.org) to learn more. But here's the challenge: the existing straight ally has to make this ask without mentioning their GLBT loved one or the fact that they are GLBT themselves.

Remember: This can be a little trickier than you think. Don't use pressure or guilt to get them to act. The arguments you make to get a parent or GLBT person to join PFLAG will not be as persuasive in getting a nonrelative ally to join Straight for Equality.

After a few minutes, have the pair switch roles to practice from the other perspective.

Discussion (25 minutes)

Regroup and talk about the activity.

- Ask people to share what worked and what didn't.
- Was it difficult for people to step back from their personal connection to the issue?

- How did it feel for people to ask others to be an ally?
- What are some overall ideas and tips that can be learned from this exercise?
- How can people use these skills outside of this meeting?
- Who is the first person that you will approach in your life?

☀ **Introduce Straight for Equality (15 minutes)**

Share more information about Straight for Equality with your chapter members. You can use the first few pages of this booklet as a guide, or you can go online to **www.straightforequality.org** to access the most recent news and resources.

- Discuss next steps for chapter members and ways that they can get further involved (below)
- Discuss using Straight for Equality in your speakers bureau (more information can be found on this topic in the next section) and plan for its implementation
- Determine the best ways to get started
- Decide who will be take the lead
- Plan timeline to get started
- Discuss using Straight for Equality as a coalition-building tool (more information can be found on this topic starting on page 27 of this book)
- Share ideas about potential community partners
- Set up a time to brainstorm more (maybe the next meeting's program!)

☀ **Next Steps for Chapter Members**

Hosting a chapter program about Straight for Equality is a great way to spread the word about the project and get your membership excited about the possibilities that it presents. The chapter program helps members prepare themselves and practice talking to new and potential straight allies and gives them the “other person perspective” that they need to work on their approach.

The chapter program is only the beginning. Below are some more advanced or “extra credit” steps that your members take. Chapters can make this into a fun competition and an easy, ongoing project that can get members engaged in a new way. These ideas can help new members get engaged or more seasoned members to stay connected. New opportunities for involvement help keep people coming back!

Get the conversations going!

As you learned earlier, one-on-one conversations can be both intimidating and rewarding. Encourage your membership or make a commitment as a group for each chapter member to begin five conversations with straight people about GLBT issues. Approach friends, neighbors, coworkers and members of your faith group to talk about these issues. Listen to people's questions and concerns respectfully and enjoy the chance to share these issues with others. Remember, inviting people to be allies is the most important step!

Invite straight allies to take the pledge.

E-mail straight allies and potential straight allies and ask them to take the Straight for Equality pledge. You can send them the link: www.straightforequality.org/pledge. Let them know how important straight allies are and how much these issues matter to you. By signing on to the pledge, allies can commit to coming out, speaking up, and joining in!

Invite a straight ally to attend an event with you.

After beginning conversations, you are sure to find supportive straight allies who have not been engaged yet. Encourage these straight allies further by inviting them to attend a local event with you. Let allies know about local events hosted by PFLAG or other GLBT organizations that they might be interested in attending. While straight allies may not be interested in attending PFLAG support meetings, they may want to attend special events or social functions hosted by your chapter or in the community.

Make sure straight allies are welcome.

It is important for all chapter members to commit to helping to make the GLBT movement welcoming to straight allies. Encourage straight allies who come to your events or meetings. Let them know how appreciated they are. Also help educate others involved in the movement about the importance and role of straight allies. This is just another way that PFLAGers can be leaders within the GLBT community!

Follow up with members at upcoming meetings about how these things are going. Talking about the process of asking people to

become allies may open up new topics for your support meetings. Many PFLAGers are very active in GLBT issues but find they don't know how to discuss this work in other areas of their lives. For those that are ready to take that step, Straight for Equality is a great vehicle. Sharing successes and fears about how to approach allies, help them understand that they are invited to help, and assist them in overcoming barriers and taking an active role in moving equality forward will be a great new topic for PFLAGers to work on.

Guiding people and encouraging their growth at their own pace can be frustrating for many of our serious advocates for whom advocacy is a way of life. However, encouraging people to see that taking the time to help new allies get on the right path is worth the effort and patience. Building strong allies is a long-term project. Straight for Equality will give you the tools to work with allies and have a major impact on the future.

4.

**Energize your
speakers
bureau
with
Straight for
Equality**

Now you've got something — and someone — new to talk about.

Many PFLAG chapters have shown that their speakers bureaus can be a great resource to their communities. By getting out into the community and spreading their message through telling personal stories, chapters influence and reach people on a personal level that hits home. Stories from families are things most people can relate to and create great connections to establish common ground.

Whether your chapter is just getting your speakers bureau off the ground (or just thinking about it) or you have had an active speakers bureau for years, Straight for Equality can help to provide a new vision to take your group even further. A strong speakers bureau can help you bridge the gap between PFLAG and other organizations and help spread important information to people in your community.

Straight for Equality is aimed at reaching out to new allies in the movement and helping to get them engaged. When you have straight allies telling their stories, willing to answer questions (like, “Weren’t you worried that people would think you’re gay too?”) and starting conversations (“Let me tell you about my best friend in the world...”) in a non-intimidating way, you will open up a whole new arena of people receptive to your message and groups that you can talk to. Used effectively, this nonconfrontational approach should allow you to expand the groups and businesses that you have been targeting in your community.

The Speakers

Finding a small panel of speakers for your PFLAG Straight for Equality event will be similar to a panel that is used for other speakers bureau events. Hearing from PFLAG moms and dads is always powerful! Remind them to talk about their growth as an ally and how far they have come, along with the barriers that they had to overcome. They can be a positive example of allies who started out not familiar with GLBT issues, but found that they have a very personal connection and have worked to make themselves well-versed in these issues. Often, having a mom or dad can be less intimidating to ask questions of!

Straight allies – the kind that Straight for Equality aims to invite into our family – have fascinating stories, too. Without a direct family connection, their stories, when told with those of PFLAG parents, show that equality is an issue for everyone. The kinds of people who are working for equality have no “type,” and a

speakers bureau that includes a diversity of ally voices proves this point.

As we mentioned before, straight allies will be interested in getting involved at a number of different levels. Your chapter's speakers bureau might be just the place for them, and inviting them to join could open doors. Speakers bureau events would let them share their story of being an ally, allow them to answer questions, and help move other potential allies along. This could be a way to engage straight allies in your chapter that does not include attending support meetings or getting involved in the day-to-day activities of the chapter.

The Q&A

While you will encounter a variety of different questions after the panel presents its stories, it is good to have some questions prepared to help people feel confident as they “go public.” Providing some commonly asked questions and suggestions for answering them may help get the ball rolling and start conversations.

Here are sample questions. Being familiar with the group you're speaking to and your region can also help you determine other likely questions from the audience. While it is good to fit your program to the specific group that you are meeting with, be careful not to make it too narrow. Different types of groups (church group versus a local school group) may have different issues that will more directly affect them, but they should also be learning to be a straight ally in all aspects of their lives.

- How do I respond to a coworker who continuously makes anti-gay comments?
- How do I respond when one of my friends says “that’s so gay”?
- How do I answer my child’s questions about a classmate with two moms or two dads?
- What should I do when someone makes vast generalizations about GLBT people?
- What should I do if I suspect someone I know is GLBT?
- How can I show friends/coworkers/neighbors/acquaintances that I accept that they are GLBT?
- How do I respond if someone assumes that I’m gay when I’m not?

Sample Letter

Chapters with successful speakers bureaus have learned the importance of knowing how to invite themselves to speak! Having a strong letter introducing your chapter is a great way to get in the door.

Before you get started, you need to determine who should get the letter. If someone in the chapter knows someone at the place you are planning to speak, have them send the letter addressed to that person, or have them call their contact and ask to whom you should address the letter. If you don't have a contact at the organization or group, give the group or company a call and ask to whom a letter about speaking should be addressed. However, you are reaching out to a group, so remember to be professional and polite. And don't give up if your first contact falls through!

On page 25, you'll find a sample letter that your chapter can use to solicit an invitation to speak at an upcoming event.

Be prepared

With all speakers bureau engagements, it is important to be sure that you are prepared and have all of the appropriate materials on hand. Being prepared will not only make the event run stress-free but will also impress your hosts. Being organized, friendly, and easy to work with will make groups want to invite you back and recommend you to other groups. Here are a few things that might be helpful to remember:

Tips for the Day of the event:

- Be sure to bring contact information for the person that is coordinating the event and for anyone else that is joining you to speak
- Be on time. If you are not familiar with the location, give yourself plenty of time to get there
- Dress professionally
- Prepare any statements ahead and be sure that they fit into the time allotted
- Practice your story! Other chapter members can help you with your presentation style and guarantee you are on the right track for your potential ally audience
- Be courteous and respectful to everyone that you encounter



PFLAG Springfield

Mr./Ms. [name goes here]

Title

Address

Dear Mr./Ms. [name goes here]:

The purpose of this letter is to formally inquire if, on behalf of the [your chapter name] chapter of Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG), someone from our local speakers bureau could present at your upcoming meeting/training/event about our new project, Straight for Equality.

Straight for Equality is a new national outreach and education program to educate and engage straight individuals to better support the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) people in their lives. This project about answering questions and starting conversations. We would like to come and talk to your employees/members about how they can be better allies to their GLBT friends, neighbors, and coworkers.

We have been fortunate enough to speak with many other local organizations and have received positive feedback after our visits. We have recently given presentations at _____ and _____ (include recent successful programs, if your group is just getting started mention other work that you have done in the community). We also often receive inquiries from a number of other local groups/businesses that have heard about our programs.

We would be pleased and honored if you would allow someone from our chapter to speak to your organization.

I will call you in the next week to follow up on this request. Please let me know if you have any questions, and I'd be more than happy to provide answers.

Sincerely,

Your Name

Title

PFLAG [chapter name]

Your contact information (phone and e-mail)

- Remember that Straight for Equality is not a political project, so avoid references to political leaders and your own political ideology
- Your goal is to attract new straight people to become allies, so focus your presentation on how you overcame barriers when it came to speaking up, and how this project can help them do the same

Materials list

- ✓ Sign-in sheet. Include a space to ask for more information and to collect e-mail addresses so that you can contact people about upcoming events
- ✓ Pens and paper for questions. (It is often a good idea to have people write down their questions. This can be less intimidating than having to stand up and ask them.)
- ✓ Information about your local PFLAG chapter

Adding the Straight for Equality voice to your speakers bureau can inject new life and ideas into your work. Using Straight for Equality can help you to rethink how you are telling your personal stories and target them for a different purpose and direction. Straight for Equality can also help you to bridge the gap between your PFLAG chapter and other local groups.

5.

**Build new
coalitions
with
Straight for
Equality**

That's right. It's time to make new friends.

For chapters, coalition building is a priceless tool. Working in coalitions can help to strengthen your chapter by increasing participation, visibility, and diverse points of view. Strong coalitions develop credibility for your messages and your work.

Straight for Equality can be a great new tool in your coalition work. It can help you connect with a broader range of partners and demonstrate that you have common goals that can be furthered by working together.

Opening up new doors to work with groups beyond the “usual suspects” is an important activity when you need to achieve a goal. Many chapters have successfully worked with other GLBT groups, GLBT churches, and GLBT-friendly organizations. While this is a great start, there are other voices that remain untapped simply because they haven’t been asked to help, or haven’t seen your commonalities. There are a number of non-GLBT groups packed with fair-minded straight people who can be part of your work. The Straight for Equality project provides you with an opportunity to approach them and ask that their organization or group be involved in your work.

Straight for Equality can also help to bridge the gap. When straight allies are invited to support equality, you’ve got to make the case why GLBT issues should be important to them. Frequently, the issues that call for us to work in coalition – such as hate crimes legislation, or laws created to ban job discrimination – impact other groups. By helping those other groups see that they are welcome in your coalition as straight allies – and that they’re not alone – you’ve created a welcoming place for them to come and work with you.

Remember, you need to make sure that there is a benefit in the relationship for the other group as well. What will, for example, a labor group have to gain with the passage of an employment nondiscrimination bill? Or what stake does a faith group have in hate crimes laws? Be able to articulate those points before you approach anyone.

Also think about what your PFLAG chapter can do to benefit the potential coalition partner. Will you recruit PFLAGers to volunteer for their projects? Will your chapter participate in their community projects? These are also details to be clear on when starting a new partnership.

☀ **Steps to Making a New (Coalition) Friend**

Often the hardest part of coalition building is figuring out where to get started. This is a great opportunity to call on your chapter members to help in the brainstorming. You will need all the different perspectives and contacts that you can get.

1. Make a list.

First start off by creating a list of different groups in your community that you have not worked with before. Think outside of the box! Often issues – such as safe schools – have audiences that are open to hearing more about different aspects of their primary topic. Here are a few suggestions:

Community center organizers, parent groups (PTA/PTO), educators and counselors, community groups (civic, faith, diversity groups, youth advocacy, etc.), local media advocacy groups, professional group leaders (business, legal, medical, labor), physical and mental health care professional agencies, faith communities, environmental groups, etc.

The list is endless. Don't limit yourself and don't be afraid of being rejected. It doesn't cost you anything to ask, but the price of missing out on an opportunity to improve your work can be high.

2. Find a contact.

Once you've made your list, figure out if anyone in your chapter or network has any contacts in the groups you'd like to target, and write that down. No contact is too small! For example, if someone in your chapter has a neighbor who goes to one of the churches on the list, you can talk with this person more to learn about the structure of the church and who specifically to reach out to. And, as a new straight ally (since you have now used your new skills to ask them to be an ally...haven't you?) this person may be able to help facilitate the connection. At this point you are looking for any connection that could help get you in the door.

3. Make your pitch.

Finally, you need to prepare your pitch. It is important to be specific as to what you are asking these groups to do.

Coalitions are usually formed around issues or a shared goal. If you do not have an immediate project in mind – such as the passage or opposition to a town resolution that harms equality – you might begin by simply asking other groups to share an event that you’re doing. Maybe suggest that they share a booth with you at your local health fair, community education event, or civil rights activity. You can ask representatives from different groups to attend one of your chapter meetings and talk to your membership about their work, and you can talk about yours, using a Straight for Equality focus. Any of these things can help get the relationship started. As with all straight allies, people are at different levels, and it is important to remember that they will be at different levels when asking them to get involved.

Check out page 31 to see what a letter to a potential coalition partner can look (and sound) like.

Coalition building can seem like a stressful and time-consuming process at first, but the benefits often outweigh the work. New coalitions can help your chapter grow in many ways. Not only will new contacts open you up to new aspects of the community, but you will also be exposed to new ideas and new ways of doing things. There is a lot that groups in the same community can learn from each other in terms of best practices.

With Straight for Equality, chapters can make the case to a whole new network of organizations to work together. PFLAG chapters will grow and thrive through these new relationships and better their communities by engaging and educating a different demographic.



PFLAG Springfield

Mr./Ms. [name goes here]

Title

Address

Dear Mr./Ms. [name goes here]:

I want to invite you, on behalf of the [insert your chapter name] chapter of Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG), to join us at [insert event or occasion here].

One of the reasons that we're reaching out to you is because we believe that we share common ground and can help achieve each other's goals. Our PFLAG chapter has just started participating in a new national project called Straight for Equality, and we think that it could help our organizations see our similarities and make plans to work together.

Straight for Equality is a national outreach and education program to educate and engage straight individuals to better support the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) people in their lives. This new project is about answering questions and starting conversations.

We have been fortunate enough to work with many other local organizations in coalitions and are now hoping to expand our outreach in the community.

In closing, we look forward to meeting you and developing a successful relationship between our groups. We can, I think, grow and prosper together.

I will call you in a week or so to follow up.

Sincerely,

Your Name

Title

PFLAG [chapter name]

Your contact information (phone and e-mail)

5.

**What's
next?**

Hang on. We're just getting started...

stay tuned.

The PFLAG National Staff, our member leaders, and a great and talented advisory committee have been researching and developing Straight for Equality for several years and are excited to finally be able to share it with PFLAG chapters – in other words, our family. We hope that after reading this you are as excited about Straight for Equality as we are. While we will be busy working to continue to develop the project, we hope that we have provided you with the tools to get started in your own community.

Straight for Equality is a new path that will involve looking at some of our work in a fresh light. We know that there will be an adjustment period – there was one for the people involved in its creation. (Asking people to be patient in getting people to support equality is no easy task!) We encourage you to learn from your own experiences to help you in Straight for Equality. While it is often hard to remember, even the most active PFLAG members can recall how intimidating it was to go to that first meeting and get involved in PFLAG's work. Remembering those feelings will help when you work with your new straight allies. Straight for Equality will also challenge you to look beyond your comfort zone to get started. Use this resource as your road map and get going!

Recognize the value of each person's contributions. Finding the right fit as an out straight ally, for some people, will mean someday becoming more involved in issue advocacy. For them, PFLAG will provide a great place to get involved. For others, there will be no marches on Washington or the statehouse, but they'll have hundreds of meaningful everyday conversations that will truly change hearts and minds. For them, Straight for Equality is their home. Honor their efforts and unique voices, and respect their efforts.

Talk to straight people about Straight for Equality. Spread the word and get people excited. Encourage people to sign the Straight for Equality pledge. Let them know how important their support is and what a difference they can make through small changes in their lives. Be a resource to help straight people break down the barriers that exist in their lives that keep them from being involved.

Talk to GLBT people outside of your chapter about Straight for Equality. The more people we have using Straight for Equality, the more potential allies we reach. GLBT people have supportive straight friends who've never been asked to help move equality forward. Straight for Equality is a tool that can be passed along!

Introduce Straight for Equality to your chapter. Share this resource with other chapter members and start using it. Plan a program about Straight for Equality and encourage everyone to begin reaching out to straight people to talk to them about Straight for Equality. Support each other and practice having these conversations together. Brainstorm on ways to use Straight for Equality in your chapter work.

Activate and revitalize your speakers bureau. Use Straight for Equality to let allies know that they are invited to get involved. Encourage your chapter to reach out for new places to speak and let the people you reach know how much they are needed. Help answer questions and be a resource.

Build coalitions! Bridge the gap between PFLAG and other groups in your community. Reach out to other groups and let them know that they too can benefit from Straight for Equality. There is room in any group or organization for better education and understanding of GLBT issues.

Stay tuned for more Straight for Equality resources. This is just the beginning. In the coming year, we will be providing more resources for chapters to utilize Straight for Equality in their work. Chapters will be able to build on the skills learned in this resource and help to encourage growth in the straight allies that they meet. Be sure to check back on www.straightforequality.org regularly as we introduce new tools and communities on the website.

Enjoy this new PFLAG project and all the places that it will take you. Straight for Equality will help us all build on our past resources and, as we go towards the future, move equality forward.