

VIBRANT YET UNDER-RESOURCED

The State Of
Lesbian, Bisexual,
And Queer Movements
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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ASTRAEA
LESBIAN FOUNDATION
FOR JUSTICE



WHER's Executive Director, Akudo Oguaghamba, at a Psychological Empowerment workshop run by WHER in Nigeria. Credit: WHER

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

When it comes to the organizing of lesbian, bisexual, and queer (LBQ) women's and non-binary people's¹ movements and their funding needs, donors must see two realities at once:

- **LBQ-identified women and non-binary people's lives are being threatened, everyday, around the world.**

AND

- **LBQ-identified women and non-binary activists are not only creating change in all aspects of their own lives, but also are building a new political reality that is inclusive, respectful, and safe for all oppressed and marginalized communities — and indeed, for us all.**

These two statements capture the extent of the marginalization and hostility that LBQ people face, as well as the hope and potential of the growing movement of LBQ groups that are visionary, creative, strategic, and resilient.

Resourcing for LBQ organizing has failed to keep pace with the needs and the capacities of LBQ groups and movements that are operating in increasingly hostile and violent contexts.

This report, *Vibrant Yet Under-Resourced: The State of Lesbian, Bisexual, and Queer Movements*, presents a compelling picture of the current lack of resourcing for LBQ communities and makes a powerful case for why more and more effective funding is urgently needed.

Lesbian, bisexual, and queer (LBQ) groups are doing groundbreaking work. Activists are working at the intersections of gender, sexuality, race, class, and disability to challenge systemic oppression while also building knowledge among LBQ communities on holistic security, self- and collective care, social norm change, and legal and policy advocacy. Under often hostile conditions, LBQ groups are working with focus and determination to build the visibility of LBQ people by creating feminist art and cultural spaces, organizing their communities, and building awareness of LBQ people and their human rights.

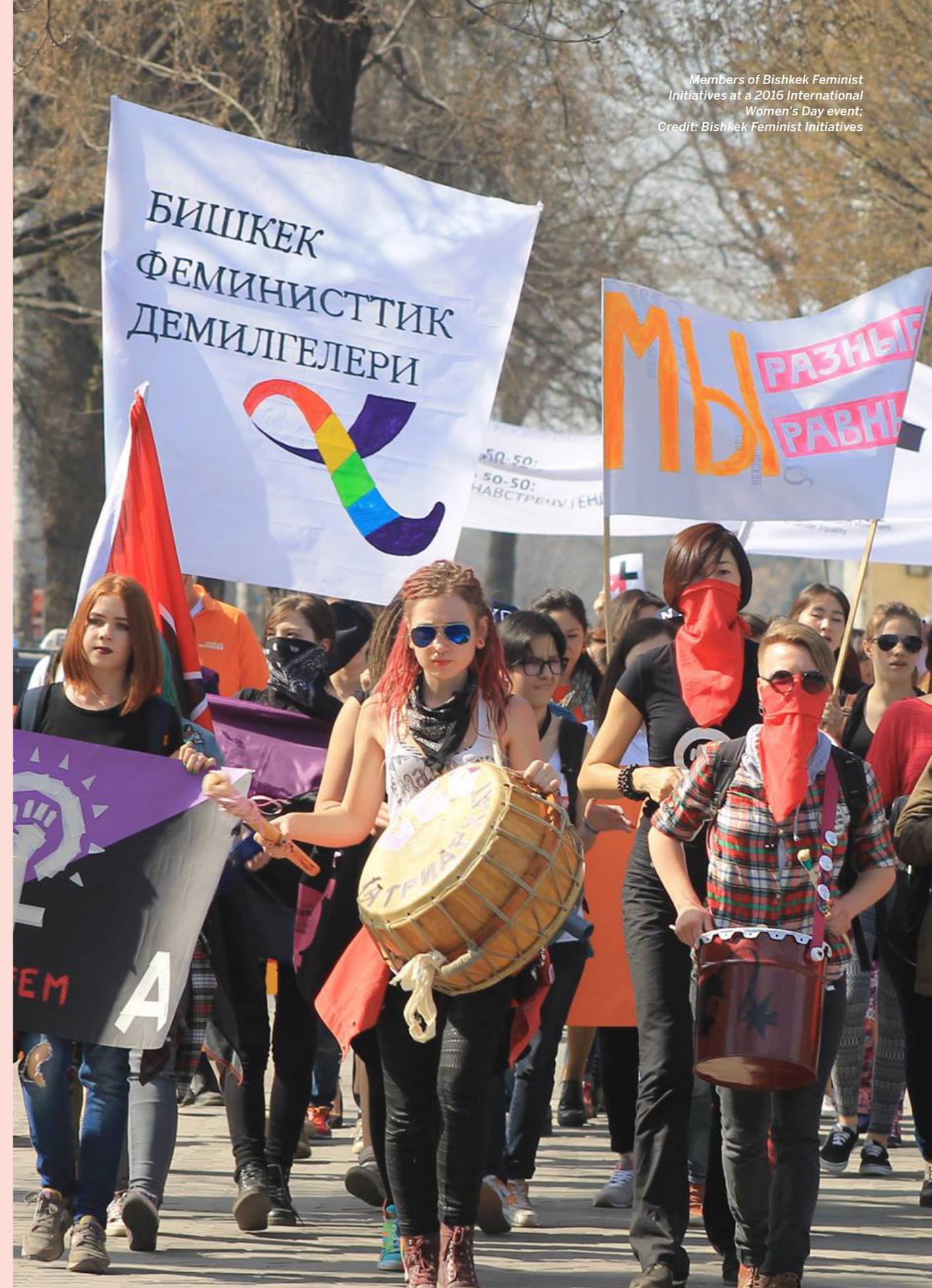
With historical roots in women's and gay rights movements, as well as other social justice movements, autonomous LBQ organizing has grown significantly in the last twenty years, often in reaction to sexism in mixed LGBTQI groups and homophobia in women's groups, and also because LBQ agendas are distinct

and need focused attention. LBQ women and non-binary people confront misogyny, homophobia, and heteronormativity; those facing multiple oppressions contend with racial and economic injustices as well. These power dynamics and social norms expose them to a unique set of human rights violations, including particular risks of violence, especially violence within the family, and discrimination in accessing education, health care, housing, and employment.

While their efforts are critical to advancing the well-being of LBQ people and achieving multiple social justice agendas, LBQ groups struggle to access funding. Despite unprecedented momentum in philanthropy to create resourcing pipelines for grassroots movements, resources for LBQ groups are inadequate and have not kept pace with the innovative ways in which they are organizing.

1 — This report uses the term "LBQ" to refer to sexual identity; this framing is inclusive of lesbian, bisexual, and/or queer women (cis or trans) and/or all non-binary people on the gender spectrum who identify as LBQ. Please see the discussion "On terminology" included in Chapter 1 on page 21.

Members of Bishkek Feminist Initiatives at a 2016 International Women's Day event; Credit: Bishkek Feminist Initiatives



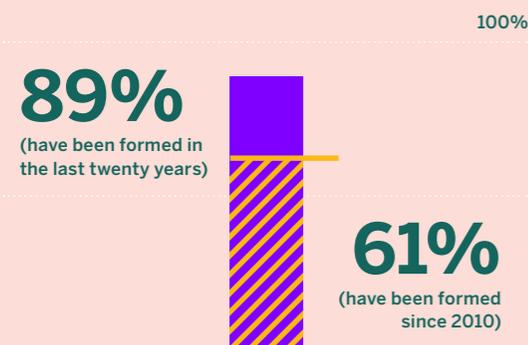
FINDINGS FROM THE ACTIVIST SURVEY

Based on a mixed-methods approach, this report presents findings from surveys conducted in 2018 with 378 LBQ groups from all regions of the world and 67 donors, including public and private foundations, as well as follow-up interviews resulting in four case studies of LBQ groups (for further details about the sample, please see the research methodology section in Chapter 1, page 22, and Appendix 1: Methodology, page 78). Following are the key findings that showcase why increased funding to LBQ groups is worthwhile, necessary, and urgent.

The key inclusion criteria for the activist survey was respondents that belong to groups that are self-governing or autonomous, and work specifically on LBQ issues or with LBQ communities. In addition, the **survey protocol required that LBQ people comprised the majority (50% or more) of the group's leadership.** As such, this research focuses on groups that are **LBQ-led.** In our discussion of LBQ groups in this report, we are referring to LBQ-led groups. We have used the terms "LBQ groups" and "LBQ-led groups" interchangeably.

1. LBQ groups are young and quickly growing in numbers.

There has been tremendous growth of LBQ groups in the last two decades in all regions of the world. Most groups (89%) have been founded in the last twenty years, and more than half (61%) have been formed since 2010.



2. LBQ groups work in intersectional ways.

LBQ groups tie their communities' well-being to a range of social justice issues. They identify strongly with lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and intersex movements and women's rights movements, but more than half (53%) of LBQ groups also work with other types of communities and on other issues such as the right to health (32%), young people's rights (26%), and sex workers' rights (20%). In doing so, they elevate the needs of LBQ communities, bring LBQ leadership to diverse movements, and contribute to progress on multiple social issues.

3. LBQ groups utilize multiple robust organizing strategies to achieve their aims.

An overwhelming majority (around 90%) of LBQ groups use movement building, advocacy, and capacity building as key strategies in their activism. Close to

three-quarters (71%) use cultural change strategies, including creating media and art, preserving LBQ history, and addressing the restrictive cultural norms that underpin the oppression they face, and more than two-thirds (69%) engage in research and knowledge production to fill major information gaps about LBQ people and their experiences.

LBQ groups also provide life-saving support to their own communities, addressing the violence and trauma they experience. Nearly two-thirds (63%) offer direct health and social services, as well as mental health and wellness support to LBQ communities, and more than half (56%) use safety-related strategies in their work.

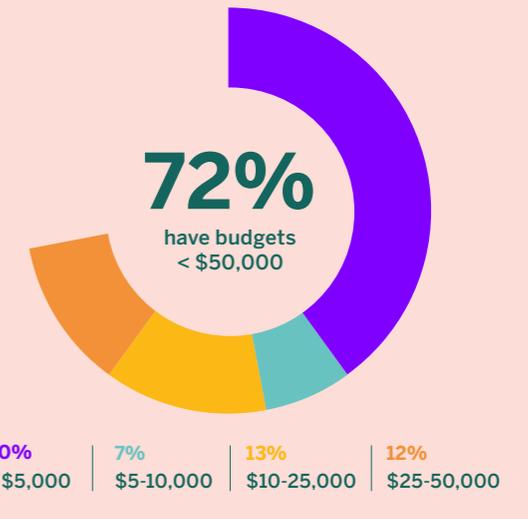


4. LBQ groups have extremely small budgets and very little access to external funding.

The median budget for LBQ groups in 2017 was \$11,713 USD. Nearly three-quarters (72%) of LBQ groups operated on **annual budgets** of less than \$50,000 per year; in fact, approaching half (40%) reported an annual budget of less than \$5,000.

One-third (34%) of groups received no **external funding**², and for nearly half (48%) of all groups, external funding did not exceed \$5,000.

2 — External funding was inclusive of government and foundation funding and excluded membership fees, community fundraisers, events, and individual contributions from founders and their family members.



The majority of LBQ groups have few, if any, paid staff and are heavily reliant on volunteers. One-quarter of all groups have no full-time staff (28%), and another 25% have just one or two staff full-time members.

5. Most LBQ groups have no savings or assets.

Groups are working under precarious conditions with little protection or recourse in times of financial crisis. Approaching three-quarters (70%) of LBQ groups have no savings, and about a quarter (27%) have no assets. Among those that do, most are assets that quickly depreciate (e.g., computers, office equipment). Given the substantial financial insecurities LBQ groups face, if they lose funding, they may be forced to dissolve or resort to other work to sustain themselves.

6. Funding for LBQ groups is sparse everywhere, with significant regional differences.

Whereas the median external funding for LBQ groups in North America was \$244,000, in every other region the median external funding received was less than \$10,000. Groups in Europe and Central Asia and in Asia and the Pacific had the lowest median external funding at \$1,150 and \$1,170, respectively.

7. LBQ groups receive insufficient support to fully implement their strategies.

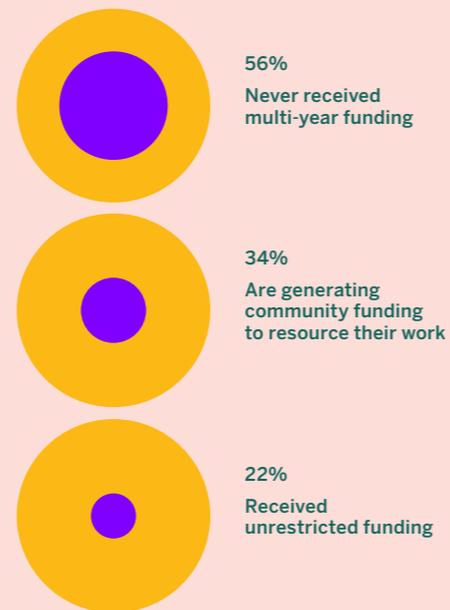
Fewer than one in four groups using advocacy, community and movement building, and capacity building — the three most common strategies — reported receiving sufficient funds for their planned activities. Other strategies critical to the visibility and well-being of LBQ groups receive even less attention: despite two-thirds of LBQ groups prioritizing these areas of work, fewer than half (44%) of donors funded research and knowledge production, while direct services, including for mental health, was funded by the fewest donors (32%).

8. LBQ groups face multiple barriers to accessing and implementing funds.

The barriers to funding that LBQ groups most frequently reported included: a lack of requests for proposals reflecting their priorities and strategies, requirements to present a successful fundraising track record, a lack of donor response to their queries, and delays in payments once funding is awarded.

9. LBQ groups receive primarily short-term and restricted funding.

More than half (56%) of LBQ groups have never received multi-year funding and less than a quarter (22%) received unrestricted funding, hampering their ability to do long-term and self-directed work. A third (34%) of LBQ groups are generating community funding to resource their work.



FINDINGS FROM DONOR SURVEY

Following are key findings that show case how improved grantmaking strategies and practices could increase support to LBQ groups:

1. Many donors have no strategy in place to ensure that funding reaches LBQ communities.

Among surveyed foundation donors that don't provide dedicated funding to LBQ groups but describe their funding as inclusive of LBQ communities³, two-thirds (67%) do not seek out opportunities to ensure that funding actually does reach LBQ communities or issues. The factors that subject LBQ people to discrimination and violence in daily life, like stigma, may also be present in civil society groups. This can prevent "LBQ-inclusive" funding that is supposed to benefit LBQ people from reaching LBQ communities.

2. Donors want to support LBQ groups' intersectional work but fund in siloed ways.

Eighty-five percent of donors were interested in funding activism across multiple issue areas but more than half (57%) of LBQ-specific funding comes from LGBTQI portfolios. Indeed, LBQ groups report most often receiving LGBTQI funding (82%). When they applied for funding in other thematic areas, such as racial justice, economic justice, or youth and children's rights, they were much less successful, despite the important intersections with these issues.

3. Non-financial support is critical but not accessible to most LBQ groups.

Donors report providing their grantees with networking opportunities (88%), capacity building on programmatic and strategy development (46%), fundraising and grant-writing (44%), and monitoring and evaluation (39%). However, only 10-12% of LBQ groups reported receiving non-financial support in these areas. Organizational strengthening priorities for LBQ groups include introductions to potential donors and capacity building support for program and strategy development, fundraising, and monitoring and evaluation.

4. Donors anticipate increasing their support for LBQ communities.

Half of the foundation donors surveyed anticipated an increase in their LBQ-specific funding in the next two years, which may be a result of the growing visibility and momentum of LBQ activism globally. This presents a compelling opportunity to align new resources with the priorities and strategies of LBQ groups and to significantly bolster their critical movement work.

Overall, the findings suggest a vibrant and growing area of activism in urgent need of greater and better quality resourcing. LBQ groups around the world are working to address some of the most pressing challenges facing oppressed communities and struggle to access the resourcing that will make their work sustainable. Their growing activism presents an important opportunity for donors to adjust funding strategies to ensure that they meet the needs and priorities of LBQ groups.

³ — "LBQ-inclusive" funding is defined as broad funding, e.g., LGBTQI or women's rights funding, that is inclusive of LBQ communities and issues, but not specifically aimed at LBQ communities and issues.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The research shows that LBQ activism is growing all over the world. These vibrant groups are determinedly doing their work with intense commitment and very little money, often in quite harsh and repressive circumstances. In their organizing across diverse movements, they are improving the lives of LBQ people while advancing multiple social justice causes.

They are, however, also struggling. LBQ groups are under-resourced and under-staffed, and they have weak safety nets. They organize intersectionally but are typically funded through narrowly defined portfolios. They envision creating long-term structural and systemic change, but are principally funded with short-term, often project-based grants.

The foundation donors who participated in this research see the value of LBQ groups' work, but current levels of funding are insufficient. Many donors are funding LBQ work through broad funding that is meant to include LBQ communities, but without strategies to ensure that the funding actually reaches LBQ-led groups. It is encouraging that half of the donors surveyed indicated an intention to increase LBQ funding in the next two years. This presents an important and timely opportunity for dedicated action to close the funding gap and ensure LBQ groups get the critical funding they need.

By providing more and better quality funding to LBQ-led groups, donors can unleash the power of LBQ groups to secure transformative change in their communities. Given rising conservatism, nationalisms, and fundamentalisms around the world, and the importance of building and supporting strong movements to fight back, funding grassroots LBQ groups who are working intersectionally and addressing some of the most pressing challenges facing our world is a smart and underutilized strategy that will enable all donors to support and advance progressive political organizing around the globe.

Recommendations to donors

1. Increase funding for LBQ communities and direct it to LBQ groups.

LBQ groups are doing creative and critical social change work, but they are hampered by insufficient funding. Forty percent of groups have a budget of less than \$5,000 USD, and a third of groups are receiving no external funding at all. New funding should be dedicated for LBQ issues and directed to LBQ-led groups, especially those based outside of North America. LBQ groups are strongly rooted in their communities, have expertise on the specific needs of LBQ people, and have the greatest accountability to LBQ people within movement ecosystems. LBQ groups work intersectionally, use multiple and diverse strategies, and are building the movements we need to fight for justice.

2. Make funding more accessible to LBQ groups.

Many LBQ groups are recently formed and have limited experience applying for funding; two in five groups are unregistered. Donors should make funding more accessible to LBQ groups by simplifying application requirements, providing feedback on rejected applications, and partnering with public foundations, women's funds, and intermediaries that have the capacity and expertise to reach and support small and/or unregistered groups.

3. Improve the quality of funding for LBQ groups.

LBQ groups require sustained funding to establish themselves and to do effective work. However, more than half (56%) of LBQ groups have never received multi-year funding and less than a quarter (22%) receive unrestricted funding. Donors should:

- Provide flexible and unrestricted funding that allows LBQ groups to pursue their own agendas, respond to changing circumstances, invest in their own capacities, and reduce the risk of burnout; and,
- Build multi-year partnerships that allow LBQ groups to do long-term planning and strategic work. Long-term funding also enables activists and donors to develop working relationships built on trust and sustained collaboration.

4. Direct funding to regions where LBQ groups' access is especially limited.

While LBQ groups are under-funded across the globe, there are stark regional differences. Groups in Europe and Central Asia and Asia and the Pacific had the lowest median external funding at \$1,150 and \$1,170, respectively. Donors should address these gaps by targeting new resources to these regions, which have strong and diverse LBQ groups and movements. While we did not have sufficient activist data to report on the Middle East/Southwest Asia, it's clear that this region also needs dedicated attention.

5. Invest in research and knowledge production and in service provision, two priorities of LBQ groups that are particularly under-funded.

Across the board, LBQ groups report that they do not have sufficient funding to implement their strategies, with some particularly notable gaps. More than two-thirds (69%) of LBQ groups engage in research and knowledge production, addressing the limited public understanding about LBQ communities and the rights violations they face. Nearly two-thirds (63%) provide direct health and social services to their communities, responding to the failures of larger institutions to meet LBQ people's needs. However, less than half (43%) of donors in our sample funded research and knowledge production, and only a third (32%) funded service delivery. Donors should give particular attention to these areas. Investing in research and knowledge production can serve the additional goal of raising visibility among funders and making the case to address LBQ groups' funding gaps. Supporting direct health services, including mental health and wellness, is critical for the well-being of LBQ organizers and the sustainability of their movements.

6. Increase non-financial support to LBQ groups and ensure it meets their needs.

LBQ groups have very limited access to non-financial support to invest in their organizational capacities, with just around 10% reporting that they receive it at all and significant disparities between what they report accessing and what donors report providing.

LBQ groups particularly need but are not receiving introductions to potential donors and capacity building support for program and strategy development, fundraising, and monitoring and evaluation. Donors should make dedicated efforts to invest in the organizational strengthening of LBQ groups as well as to connect them with new donors, contributing to their sustainability and resilience.

7. For donors without LBQ-specific portfolios, ensure that funding intended to be LBQ-inclusive actually reaches LBQ communities.

It is striking that a majority (67%) of donors who describe their work as LBQ-inclusive do not have intentional strategies to ensure that their funding is actually reaching LBQ communities. In consultation with LBQ activists, donors should develop specific and measurable strategies to ensure their funding actually reaches LBQ communities. For example, donors can ask non-LBQ-specific grantees about the strategies they use to reach LBQ people, their track record in promoting the rights of LBQ people, or how many people in their leadership identify as LBQ.

8. Seek to “de-silo” funding for LBQ groups’ intersectional work.

While the foundation donors we surveyed overwhelmingly want to support intersectional work, and LBQ groups are working across issues and movements, LBQ groups most often receive funding from LGBTQI portfolios. Donors should explore joint grantmaking initiatives that respond to LBQ groups’ intersectional organizing, including collaborations across thematic departments within institutions. There are particularly meaningful opportunities for women’s rights and gender equality donors to increase support for LBQ groups, who are working on issues of bodily autonomy, sexual rights, and gender justice. Donors who focus on sexual and reproductive health and rights, HIV and AIDS, young people, sex workers, and other issues and constituencies should also consider how LBQ groups fit into their portfolios.



DIVA For Equality members at a meeting in Fiji, 2017; Credit: DIVA For Equality

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dedication

We dedicate this report to the 378 activists who shared their data and perspectives with us. We are grateful to you for taking time out from your important work to respond to this survey. We hope this report will serve and advance your struggles for lesbian, bisexual, and queer (LBQ) women's and non-binary people's human rights, as well as be a tool to mobilize additional, much needed resources for your essential work.

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About

Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice: One of the first women's funds in the world, Astraea was founded in 1977 by a cross-class multi-racial group of women activists looking to fund a burgeoning women's movement that centered the leadership of lesbians and women of color. In 1990, we came out as a lesbian organization, proudly embracing our identity and lifting up the often unrecognized leadership of lesbians and queer people in many social movements. Today, Astraea is the only philanthropic organization exclusively dedicated to lesbian, bisexual, trans, queer, and intersex (LBTQI) rights globally. Through grantmaking, capacity building, philanthropic advocacy, and media and communications, we support brilliant and bold grassroots activists and artists who challenge oppression and seed social change. Astraea invests in, advocates for, and amplifies LBTQI and feminist movements organizing for gender, economic, and racial justice, bolstering their power and sustainability. In our 40+ year history, we are proud to have granted more than \$44 million to 1,700+ LBTQI activists and artists.

Mama Cash: Mama Cash was founded by five lesbians in 1983 and has been led by lesbian and queer women throughout our history. We fund and support women's, girls', and trans and intersex people's rights organizations and initiatives around the globe that challenge the root causes of injustice and have always worked to ensure the inclusion of LBQ women in feminist movements. Mama Cash's role is to provide the money and support that enables our grantee-partners to strengthen their organizations, build their bases of support, shape agendas for change, and collaborate with others to build movements for change. We mobilize

resources from individuals and institutions, make grants to women's, girls', and trans and intersex people's organizations, and help build the partnerships and networks they need to successfully defend and advance their rights. Since 1983, Mama Cash has awarded over €72 million to feminist and women's rights activists worldwide.

FemJust: Feminist Solutions towards Global Justice (FemJust) is a feminist consulting practice committed to supporting organizations to achieve social justice and secure human rights for all. We bring expertise and offer innovative solutions in the areas of research, policy analysis, advocacy, and capacity building. Using results-oriented feminist strategies, we work to connect people's realities to initiatives that will spur social transformation.

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In this report, "LBQ" focuses on sexual identity and is inclusive of lesbian, bisexual, and queer women, both cisgender and trans, and all non-binary people on the gender spectrum who relate to a lesbian, bisexual, and/or queer identity.



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