



Speak Out!

Activist tools for GLBT equality



HUMAN
RIGHTS
CAMPAIGN®

So You Want to Fight for Equality?

We are living in a time like no other for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) Americans. Never have the stakes been so high and never have the opportunities for real change been within our reach.

The current generation is smart, driven and dynamic — and, straight or gay, they are more accepting of difference, and GLBT people in particular, than any generation before them. There is a wonderful world ahead if only we can outlive the bias, ignorance and prejudice that have riddled our nation for decades.

But wait it out? No way! There are many things you can do right now that would have MAJOR IMPACT in helping to eradicate the vestiges of bias in your community, your state, your Congress and your country.

This is the generation that experienced Matthew Shepard left to die on a fence in the middle of a Wyoming prairie. These are the young people who have grown up understanding that labels belong on records, not on people. And we have all helped to bring our nation many miles along the path of freedom and equality. More than three decades after Stonewall, GLBT Americans are still standing proud, day after day, working at all levels to achieve equality. The gains are clear. Still, the journey to full equality is far from over.

Until Americans can be safe at work and at home, until the HIV/AIDS crisis is over, and until civil marriage equality is a reality in this country, it is up to ordinary citizens to use their voices and work for change.



What Can You Do

GLBT Americans have made many gains, but none were won without the hard work of ordinary citizens with extraordinary voices. Every time someone comes out of the closet, reports a hate crime to police, joins a GLBT advocacy group, telephones a member of Congress to ask their support on legislation, or writes a letter to the editor, our community makes progress. Pointing to the power of individuals, the Dalai Lama said, “Since periods of great change, such as the present one, come so rarely in human history, it is up to each of us to make the best use of our time to help create a happier world.”

Won't you consider becoming a part of the change you'd like to see in the world? Are you ready to stand up and be counted? Read on.

Is it right?

- That families headed by same-sex couples are denied the basic protections taken for granted by opposite-sex couples?
- That same-sex couples are taxed on domestic partner benefits? And that they're taxed more than opposite-sex couples on jointly owned property and on inherited retirement plans?
- That a gay survivor cannot receive his or her partner's Social Security death benefit, no matter how long their relationship?
- That there is no fundamental guarantee of hospital visitation or family leave in the event of illness?
- That GLBT Americans cannot sponsor a same-sex partner from another country for a green card, thus tearing many families apart?

There are more than 1,000 rights, benefits and responsibilities on the federal level that married couples enjoy, as well as several hundred on the state level. The time for full equality is now.

Spreading the Word

It's been said that if every gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender person suddenly turned purple, the very next day we'd have equal rights. Why? Because people would realize that someone they know and love is gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender — and that's how hearts and minds are changed. Knowledge shatters stereotypes. And polling backs this up: People who have a family member, a friend, a co-worker or an acquaintance who is openly gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender are more likely to support equal rights.

Coming out to yourself and to other people is an important step for any GLBT person. It's also the first step toward being political.

It's important to know when to speak up. You don't have to find a way to work gay issues into every conversation. But be on the lookout for teachable moments.

Visit HRC's National Coming Out Project on the web at www.hrc.org/ncop for more information about coming out and to download the *Resource Guide to Coming Out* and to learn about coming out in communities of color.

There are many opportunities to come out:

■ **Come out to family and friends**

The most important conversations to be had are with family and friends — people who are close to us and will listen to what we have to say.

■ **Come out to co-workers**

Co-workers often talk about weekend plans around the water cooler. If you are safe at work, why not mention that your weekend plans include a same-sex partner or gay friend or family member. (Obviously, you need to know first that your employer has a policy or your state has a law against sexual orientation or gender identity discrimination. Visit www.hrc.org/worknet to find out.)

■ **Come out to clergy**

If you attend a place of worship, make your views known to the religious leaders, as well as others who attend. Many denominations are struggling with the issue of blessing same-sex unions as well as GLBT equal rights, while others have already made decisions.

■ **Come out to community**

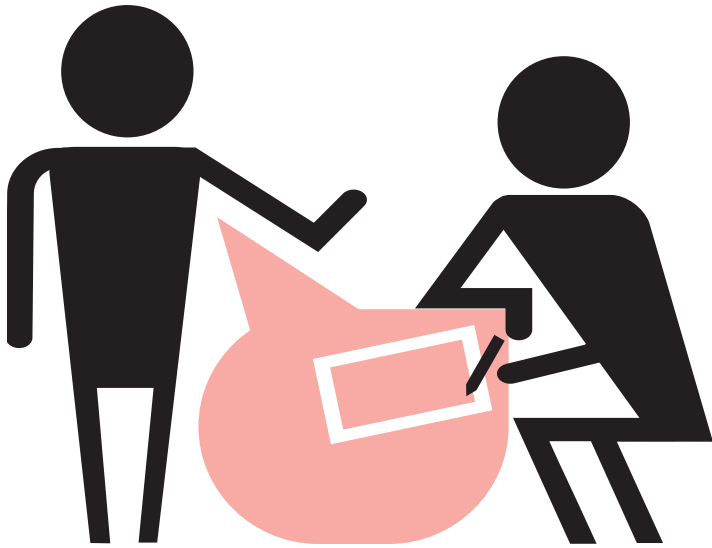
If you attend meetings or groups where fair-minded, GLBT or allied people are likely to congregate, tell them about your work for GLBT equality and invite them to participate with you in the discussion.

■ **Come out on the Internet**

The Internet has revolutionized the way we communicate. If you spend time in chat rooms, talk about your views on equal rights and enlist people to get involved with HRC's Online Action Center at www.hrc.org/actioncenter and Million For Marriage — www.millionformarriage.org

If you belong to e-mail lists, try including a blurb about GLBT equal rights in your signature, with links to HRC's Online Action Center and Million For Marriage. Likewise, Internet bulletin boards that discuss issues of interest to GLBT people and people who are passionate about civil rights are great places to post information about legislation, events and how to take action.

If you have a blog — aka an online journal — make sure to mention online activism. If you read and comment on someone else's blog, do the same.



Advocating for Public Policy with Elected Officials

Every time another governor issues an executive order to offer domestic partner benefits to state employees, another city council votes to ban discrimination based on gender identity, or another congressperson agrees to co-sponsor a bill, there is at least one ordinary constituent who can take credit for helping to make it happen. Change does not occur in a vacuum. Only by speaking out for equality do we begin to see gains for our community.

■ Letters and letter-writing campaigns

Due to the volume of faxes and e-mails that members of Congress receive, a handwritten letter carries more weight than ever. Some representatives and senators have told their staffs they want to see every handwritten letter that comes into the office. So while it takes extra effort, hand writing a letter vastly increases the likelihood that your elected official will actually see your message.

■ **E-mail and HRC's Online Action Center**

Through HRC's Online Action Center at www.hrc.org/actioncenter, you can send a fax or an e-mail with the click of a button to your state or federal elected officials. You can also sign up to receive action alerts about breaking legislation and news. Tell your friends about HRC's Online Action Center!

■ **Phone calls and phone-in days**

Especially on days when a vote on legislation is imminent, a phone call can make a great impact. Keep it short. Introduce yourself as a constituent, be prepared to give your address, and tell the person who answers the phone that you're calling to urge the elected official to vote yes or no on the particular legislation.

■ **Lobby visits**

Any citizen can seek a meeting, or lobby visit, with his or her members of Congress. In-district (local) lobbying visits are one key to advancing gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender equality. They put a face to the issue — the face of a constituent, or someone who also has the power to vote for or against the legislator. Visit www.hrc.org/actioncenter to learn how to set up and execute an effective lobby visit.

■ **Town hall meetings**

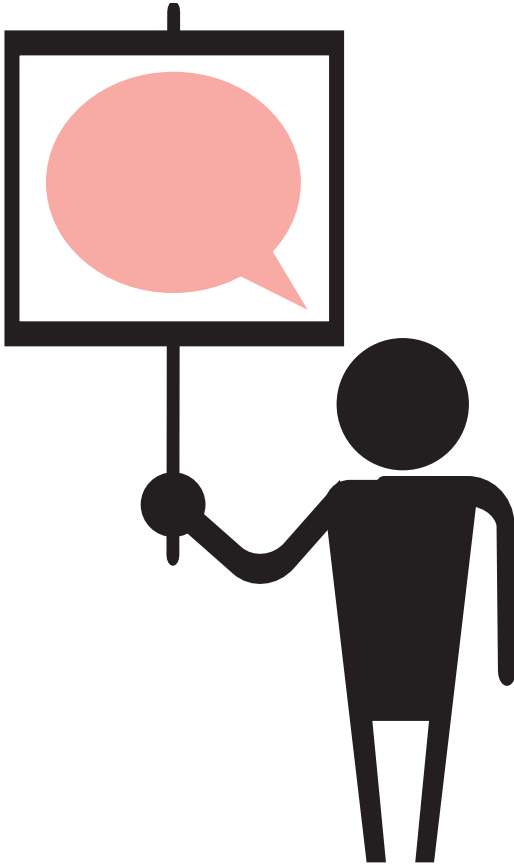
Town hall meetings are excellent forums to educate and ACTIVATE people around an issue or legislation. They're a great way to bring a diverse group of people together to learn and talk about an issue and how they can take action. Town hall meetings can vary widely in format and content, but they should be free and open to the public. Contact HRC's field organizers if you are interested in a town hall meeting in your area. E-mail field@hrc.org.

■ **Rallies and marches**

Visibility events such as rallies and marches are excellent opportunities to energize large groups of people and to get your message out in the media. Read the local GLBT newspaper or visit GLBT websites to learn when such events are planned. Or get involved and help plan one yourself!

■ **Petitions**

Petitions can be an effective way to let elected officials know that a large group of people care about an issue. And they can be useful for letting people know about an issue and soliciting them to get more involved.



Working on Political Campaigns

Political campaigns need two things to be successful — money and volunteers (not to mention a great candidate or issue!). HRC's political action committee, or PAC, contributes to candidates for federal office. So do many individuals. However, most people cannot afford to give large sums of money to candidates or to issue campaigns — but anyone can volunteer for a candidate or campaign. You can make phone calls, organize fund-raising events, go door-to-door, help people get to the polls — the list of jobs that a campaign needs to have done is enormous! Creativity is essential, and perseverance is vital. If you are committed, hard-working and reliable, you are the kind of volunteer that all campaigns need. No one person can do it all — everyone can make a difference!

Candidate elections

HRC's nonpartisan PAC makes financial and in-kind contributions to fair-minded candidates running for Senate and the House of Representatives. For more information about HRC's PAC and endorsed candidates, visit www.hrc.org/pac.

Ballot measure campaigns

In states that have the initiative or referendum process, voters can put issues on the ballot if enough sign petitions. HRC works to pass pro-GLBT ballot measures and to defeat anti-GLBT ballot measures. Right-wing activists have often been successful in using the initiative process to deny equal rights to GLBT people. While the number and scope of ballot campaigns vary from year to year, you can find up-to-date information about them at www.hrc.org.

Candidate meet-and-greets

One of the best ways to introduce a new or incumbent candidate to voters is to organize a candidate meet-and-greet. These events are not fund raisers — rather, they are a chance for candidates to meet the people they would like to represent (or, if they're seeking re-election, the people they already represent). They are free and usually held in a private home. If you would like to organize a meet-and-greet in your area, contact HRC's field organizers at field@hrc.org.

Voter registration drives

Voters who identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual in exit polling typically make up about 5 percent of the electorate — a significant proportion that has made the difference in many close races. That’s why it’s so important that GLBT and allied voters are registered, because in most states you can’t vote if you aren’t registered. Organizing a voter registration drive is something that everyone can do, and HRC is here to help you. For a voter registration kit, e-mail HRC’s field organizers at field@hrc.org. You can also hold a “virtual registration campaign” online using HRC’s Online Voter Registration form at www.hrc.org/actioncenter.

Fund raising

If you want to organize a fund-raiser for a campaign, that’s great! Depending on your previous experience with events, you may wish to organize a house party. House parties are a good way to bring together your friends and acquaintances to raise money for a fair-minded candidate or a ballot campaign. If you would like to organize a candidate house party, contact HRC at field@hrc.org — we can put you in touch with the campaign staff!



Framing the Discussion in the Media

Media coverage is one of the best ways to gain the attention of decision-makers, educate the public and overcome stereotypes. It is also a vital way of countering the vast resources that are poured into influencing the public by ultra-conservative organizations that thrive on denigrating the GLBT community. With a little savvy and a lot of gumption, you can work with the media and influence public debate.

Letters to the editor

If you like to write, are pretty good at it and have something compelling to say, you're ready to write your own letter to the editor. This section of your local newspaper offers an ideal method of getting your message across to a wide variety of readers. More people read the letters to the editor section than almost any other part of the paper. To learn how you can craft a good letter to the editor, visit: www.hrc.org/actioncenter.

Opinion editorials

If you find you have a flair for letters to the editor — i.e., they get published! — then you might enjoy the challenge of drafting an op-ed. Op-eds enable you to have your say in a format that allows more detail than a letter to the editor. Also, if your paper editorializes on a subject and you disagree with that opinion, you can ask for space to publish an alternative view.

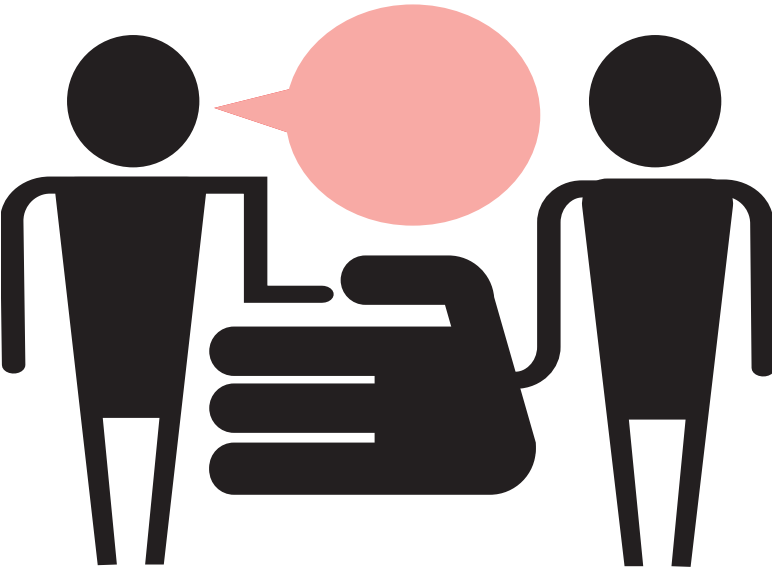
Editorial board meetings

The editorial section of a newspaper is widely read and highly influential, especially among decision makers. Generally, there is a board of editors who decide what position the paper will take on various subjects, and these people need information as they consider the issues. Most newspapers also are committed to public service and thus often use their editorial pages to articulate community values and stake out positions. If you can assemble a small, diverse group of citizens and present issues in a compelling fashion, you might be able to convince your local newspaper's editorial board to write its own positive editorial, thereby influencing thousands.

GLBT Media

In many cities, weekly or monthly GLBT publications are published — and there are several national GLBT magazines as well as website-only GLBT news sources. If you're not sure whether your area has a GLBT newspaper, a quick web search for "GLBT newspaper" and the name of your city is likely to answer that question. Why are the GLBT media important? These publications are where issues of importance to our community are reported, analyzed and debated — and where many GLBT and allied people go for information about events, community resources and the latest in-depth coverage. As such, they're an invaluable tool for an activist — you — to find and educate other potential activists.





Outreach and Volunteer Recruitment

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.” So said Margaret Mead, anthropologist and educator. Mead also believed that human diversity is a resource, not a handicap, and that all human beings have the capacity to learn from and teach each other. By looking for other individuals, groups and organizations that share your goals and by creating a common ground, one will become many, and many will become a movement.

Coalition building

A coalition is an “organization of organizations” united around a common issue. Understanding that GLBT Americans are not the only ones who can fight for GLBT rights is vitally important to crafting a viable political movement. By finding others with shared goals — those who wish to expand civil rights, increase diversity and tolerance, and reduce hate violence against minority communities — GLBT activists broaden our voice and increase our political power.

House parties

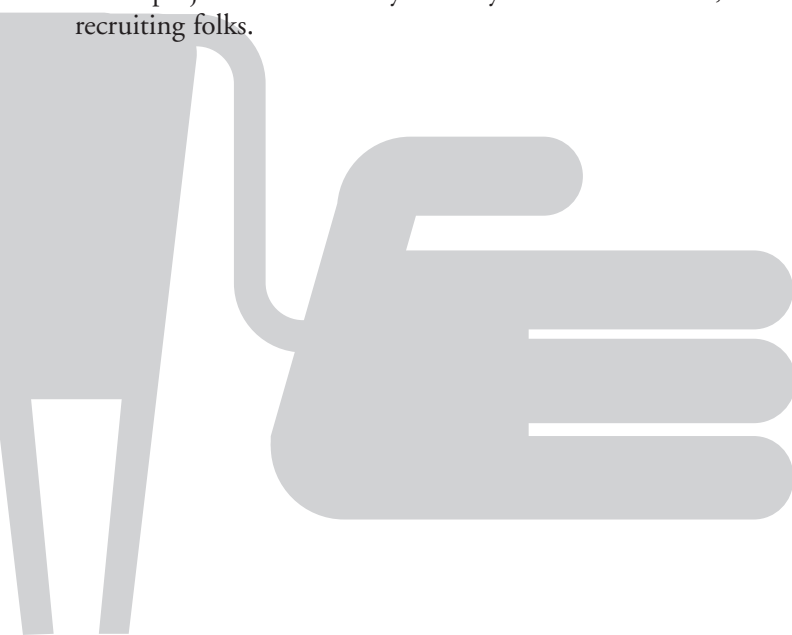
Which sounds like more fun — attending a lecture on marriage equality for same-sex couples, or getting a few people together to write letters to your elected officials on marriage equality while munching on chips and listening to music? For many people, a party makes everything better, so why not have a house party to gather your friends, rally them around the cause of GLBT equality, and have fun at the same time? To learn more about having a house party to further GLBT initiatives, contact *membership@brc.org*.

Tabling at bars, bookstores, coffee shops

You don't change hearts and minds by sitting at home and waiting for the unenlightened to knock on your door. To rally the community, gather signatures and letters, and spread the gospel of equality, you've got to get out into society. Volunteer for an organization, hand out literature, talk to people about a cause that moves you, and maybe even make new friends!

Volunteer recruitment

Volunteers. There's no doubt that we need them, but where do we find them, how do we convince them to help and how can we keep them coming back? The answer lies in your passion and your commitment to organization. If you can communicate your message with conviction, others will hop on board and get involved. Make sure to keep your volunteers interested, engaged and busy. Thank them profusely for their help. Cultivate their skills. And infuse a bit of fun into otherwise mundane tasks, like envelope-stuffing or signature-gathering. If you have a project that interests you and you need volunteers, HRC can assist you in recruiting folks.



In Conclusion

Now that you've read all about grassroots advocacy, what can you do with all of this information? Never fear! HRC's field department employs professional field organizers who are eager to guide you in your efforts and put you to work for GLBT equality. Visit www.hrc.org/actioncenter to find out who your regional field organizer is and how you can get involved immediately. HRC also has political subcommittees across the country in cities such as San Francisco, Columbus, Atlanta and Boston, to name a few.

A cadre of committed HRC members also serve as congressional district coordinators, working on HRC's grassroots legislative and electoral efforts in their local community. These HRC members are the backbone of HRC's work to elect fair-minded candidates to federal office, shape local media regarding GLBT issues, keep members of Congress informed and aware of the concerns of GLBT constituents, and much, much more. To learn more about opportunities in your area, e-mail field@hrc.org today!

- **For other volunteer opportunities, to host a house party, or help with a local pride event, visit: www.hrc.org/volunteer**
- **To take action with your members of Congress, visit: www.hrc.org/actioncenter**
- **To sign up for HRC newsletters, visit: www.hrc.org/actioncenter**
- **To become an HRC member, visit: www.hrc.org/joinus**
- **To register to vote, visit: www.hrc.org/actioncenter**



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