**Getting ready for May 17 : Community building and Campaigning in times of COVID-19**

**Physical distancing doesn't have to mean *social* distancing. Communities are more important than ever and physical distancing should mean getting socially actually *closer*.**

**May 17 will provide one of these key opportunities for this, and here are some ideas about how to make it happen.**

## IDEAS FOR ACTION

### Crowdfunding

LGBTQI+ people are particularly vulnerable to the impact of COVID-19 as many are part of the poorest people and are already victim of many forms of discrimination, stigma and persecution. Funding is desperately needed and May 17 can provide a good entry point for a call for solidarity. There is an infinite list of resources on how to create a fundraiser. This article is a good place to start: https://www.signupgenius.com/nonprofit/tips-for-nonprofit-fundraising.cfm

One additional tip that we would like to offer: Underlining the vulnerability of LGBTQI+ people in the face of COVID-19 is important, but it is likely to get unnoticed in times where people are all concerned mainly about themselves. A more effective frame to connect with people in these times could be to share advice and tips on how we, as a community of people who have been often forced to live in isolation from others (either physically or mentally), have learned to cope with this. Showing understanding and providing support could be an effective tactics to generate some reciprocity.

### Flashmobs from home:

- Italians took to their rooftops singing, an act that went viral.

https://www.bbc.com/news/video_and_audio/headlines/51886547/coronavirus-italians-sing-from-their-windows-to-boost-morale

For May 17, a predefined LGBTQI+ anthem can be played (and sung?) simultaneously by people at their windows. The information should be available early on online so people can get ready to join and the event should be well referenced so

that when it happens curious people who wonder what is going on and search the net can find the answer easily.

- Banging pots and pans has been used around the world, more to express outrage than in order to voice support, but it's been used these days also to support health care workers

https://beautifultrouble.org/tactic/cacerolazo/

**Flagging:**

People hang flags, posters or banners at their window or wear something identifiable when they take walks. More permanently visible than a flashmob.

For May 17, there could be a special hanging of Pride flags with banners (or handmade "red cross" flags) supporting health care workers, both to show support and gratitude to health care workers in general but also to salute LGBTQI+ health care workers who risk their lives.

A gay man is the first nurse reported to have died of the virus in New York City, reports *The New York Times*.

https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/26/nyregion/nurse-dies-coronavirus-mount-sinai.html?action=click&module=Top%20Stories&pgtype=Homepage

**Online community events:**

Homo Sapiens is not a solitary animal. Forced to confinement, this species finds every possible trick and tactic to keep connected to mates. From  Zoom yoga classes, Skype book clubs, Periscope jam sessions to Cloud Clubbing, the internet is rife with creative ways to keep engaged with others. Some of these can definitely be of inspiration to creative campaigners for May17

- Virtual church services

With online/TV/radio preachers all over the world, online services are nothing new. The challenge is to try to replicate the feeling of community, which makes services so important for worshipers. This tutorial offers a large range of technical advice: https://youtu.be/ve8ntVByzoU

One example of what this can look like @ https://www.facebook.com/GreenFaith/

- Cloud Clubbing

Most clubs have now taken their parties online and DJ rely on voluntary donations to keep them afloat.

For May 17 it would be interesting to customise the party so that it has a distinctive flavor. For example there could be a “protest” dress code or playlist could feature plenty of protest songs. This might be a good place to start looking for these: https://pitchfork.com/features/lists-and-guides/50-songs-that-define-the-last-50-years-of-lgbtq-pride/

- Online performances

Cabarets, drag shows, standups, can all be taken online with a minimal technical equipment.

This article reports on a nice initiative that brings drag artists from different countries together https://www.theguardian.com/world/video/2020/mar/26/coronavirus-cabaret-the-online-show-combating-social-isolation-video?fbclid=IwAR3omUwcnhjJc6H_BYJhIN5DnnxB0slkA4kcS-3PF9SZ5lipdP1kXNMpb3M

- Meditation classes

Members of the LGBTQI+ community are particularly vulnerable to social isolation. Meditation can be extremely helpful to help people cope.

For May 17, a special event can be designed to help people overcome internalised stigma.

If you don’t have the ability to conduct a meditation yourself, you can organise a collective watching of free online meditations and psychology talks. I would personally recommend Psychologist, Bhuddist and Meditation teacher Tara Brach. Her inspiring talks are all free online on her site. Of particular relevance : Her talk on how to confront the pandemic fear https://www.tarabrach.com/facing-pandemic-fears/ and her talk about how to confront addiction https://www.tarabrach.com/healing-addiction/

These talks provide very inspiring starting points for deep conversations.

There are many meditation apps that hook people with a free trial and are mere commercial ventures. The only app that I know which is really free (you can support them if you want extra features, but you really don’t need them for illimted access to all), totally wiki community-based, and open to all is Insight Timer.

**Live programs**

Live programs (Facebook lives or online radio programs) can be a good way to connect people.

Viewers/Listeners can be invited to call in and share their opinions or stories, which makes it more interesting than just listening.

May 17 could be a good moment to launch an online radio station, or at least a regular online event (e.g. on the 17th of each month), with a distinctive flavor that can keep a specific target group engaged (“17” could be appropriate to target young people)

https://www.wikihow.com/Organize-Events-on-Facebook

**“Collective” film screenings**

Now movie theaters are closed and we can’t organise movie watching parties at home, there are other ways of creating that special feeling of watching a film with other people. This is pretty easy to organise on zoom.

With teleconf apps like zoom, skype, team, etc.  you can also organise collective screenings through screen sharing, which can be more fun when watching a comedy, a sing along, a horror movie, etc.

These moments can become a good way to engage with your community members who usually don't engage with you, either because they are too shy or because they are generally not interested in community activities.

For May 17, a special event can be organised around watching a documentary on a topic which you feel passionate about. If there is a silver lining to the COVID crisis, it is that a lot of community members have much more time and interest than before to engage in deeper reflections. We have started updating a list of documentaries we published some time ago that deal with many aspects of our lives.All these documentaries are interesting material to organise community discussions around. Of course this list is a bit of a personal and random selection of material available in English. You can also find many more online.
https://sogicampaigns.org/portfolio/film-screening/

Watching one of the fabulous films from that list that specially focus on LGBT activism can be a great way to make your audience gain more insights into the fascinating work that your organisation does, and maybe get them hooked to become volunteers. https://sogicampaigns.org/portfolio/activists-are-movie-heroes/

And you have of course, and luckily, a host of LGBTQI+ themed movies to show from, if you prefer. Take this list of 50 as a good starting point:https://www.gaystarnews.com/article/best-lgbt-movies-tomatoes/#gs.hggjpb

**Reader circles**

More demanding that movie circles, reader circles invite people to collectively read a book, an essay or an article and facilitate a discussion, possibly also bringing in the author or selected authoritative commentators. This is a good upgrade from online events with no preliminary reading, as in these reader circles people start with a common framing of the debate, which makes conversations more relevant.

For May 17, a reading list can be sent in advance with a list of 7 topics that will be discussed during live event on each day of the May 17 week

An interesting list of books to get started:
https://ilga.org/list-resources-smartworking-wellbeing-lgbti-communities-covid19-coronavirus

**Offline virtual protests:**

When physical gatherings are not possible, it is still possible to show the power or people offline in other ways: gather photos made of individuals with signs, print them out and display en masse publicly at the specific target. Consider chalking outlines of participants.

> Creating political artwork is a great activity to do when you are stuck at home and want to express yourself.
>
> Some organisations like 350.org are engaging with their supporters and provide them with training kits for creative aRtivism. A clever way to keep people engaged and to get them to use this time of social distancing to develop new skills.

https://art.350.org/kits/climate-strike-arts-kit/
Call for artistic submissions
https://community.amplifier.org/campaign/global-open-call-for-art/?fbclid=IwAR2tFxa-919WhhayTn2xopeir9a_i5ZBeJBRSTHQ_UU4vlHo2seOO-Mo1Uw

This can be a good opportunity to connect with a virtual political art making party:
https://www.facebook.com/events/503158367064390/permalink/510002486379978/

For May 17, people can be invited to create artwork, which can be displayed either online or printed out by organisers and hung as a banner.

Guerilla projections and protest holograms require just a few people, and often require no permit! Consider projecting a live feed of comments as well.

For May 17, a hologram demonstration can be a powerful way to show that sexual and gender minorities are respecting the lockdown rules but that freedom of assembly is, in the long run, not negotiable.

More ideas on how to make this happen:

https://sogicampaigns.org/portfolio/staying-safe-send-your-hologram-to-protest/

**Taking your conference online**

If you were thinking of a conference or a panel discussion to mark May 17, taking it online might provide an opportunity to change the format, as lengthy presentations are not an option for an online event. These tips for creating lively panel discussions might seem basic but make sure you tick all the boxes https://www.smartmeetings.com/meeting-planning/91957/10-tips-to-improve-panel-discussions

Facilitation of the interaction with the audience will be all the more difficult online but here are some useful tips on how to make it happen: https://blog.clickmeeting.com/9-key-tips-for-an-effective-panel-discussion-in-your-webinar

**Release reports and advocacy research**

Every year, many organisations choose May 17 to release annual reports on the situation of LGBTQI++ people, or other pieces of research and advocacy papers. This year, it might make sense to publish specific pieces of research on the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the community. This report from Egale Canada provides inspiration for this.

**Personal connections:**

Helping people connect to each other, not necessarily (only) to your organisation, is a powerful objective, and not necessarily easy. But some initiatives provide great inspiration for this. On Amnesty's model of writing personal letters or postcards, May 17 can be a good moment to launch a virtual postcard campaign, inviting audiences

to connect with people from around the world. The COVID-19 crisis can potentially be a powerful frame to connect people over.

ILGA has just launched this type of campaign https://ilga.org/covid19

This initiative from a former Trans inmate is a powerful example: https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2019/12/27/the-rainbow-cards-project-christmas-lgbt-disowned-ellis-roberts-wright/

The Rainbow Cards  campaign provides also inspiration: https://sogicampaigns.org/portfolio/post-a-rainbow-share-love/

And this article provides advice on how to run a letter-writing campaign https://sogicampaigns.org/how-to-mount-an-effective-letter-writing-campaign/

Sometimes the challenge can be how to deliver the messages to people in isolation, more than to actually get the messages written. In which case it makes sense to team up with LGBTQI+ organisations on various continents, which can also provide a great way to educate your supporters about the diversity of gender expressions and sexualities. The initiative can also be directed at specific minority groups in the country/area you are in, for example migrants/refugees. In that case it is important to team up with an organisation that works with them and channel the support messages through them. The organisation Freedom from Torture for example channelled the messages of support to migrants that their supporters wrote through the psychological support services these people accessed.

**Collages**

Inviting for contributions from you audience in order to create an original piece of work is a good way to build a sense of community

This lip-sync video on Lili Allen's pop hit "fuck you very much" is a very old example of this tactic, but we still like it :)

**Living Libraries**

For May 17, you can invite audiences to dialogue directly with specific people. This can specifically draw users from "neighbouring" communities who are curious, but not yet supportive. Organisers obviously have to publish a very specific code of conduct (what questions/language are appropriate, protection of data, etc.) and make sure it is complied with.

**Selfie contests**

Arguably, selfie contests have been around for many years and campaigners had better find creative angles in order to make this kind of action still appealing but there are now a lot of special apps that can bring new momentum to this. Check some out here.

Here is an article with some ideas around this.

**(Re-)Launch a survey**

Many people are likely to still be under lockdown by May 17, unfortunately. So with more time on their hands, they might be more likely to respond to that survey you wanted to do, or on which you got too little feedback. A good moment to reiterate.

**More resources**

There is a lot of thinking and innovation taking place at the moment on how to react to the COVID-19 crisis. We are building the list below as we go. Please send us your suggestions on the collective working document

**Digital Charity Lab**: Digital projects for non-profits during the Coronavirus crisis

**More Onion**: Digital Engagement during COVID-19 crisis Webinar

**TIPS FOR COMMUNICATION IN TIMES OF COVID--19**

On May 17, which is a moment that was created to bring us all together, you can insist that we should not practice SOCIAL distancing, but PHYSICAL distancing and social NEARING

A global crisIs like COVID-19 triggers all kinds of fantasies, that reflect in the language we use to talk about it, and especially the metaphors. This excellent article by the Public Interest Research Center brings interesting food for thought on this. A good way to think deeper on the effects of our own communication around it, and whether it is not fuelling the fire that we are committed to fighting.
https://publicinterest.org.uk/part-4-metaphors/

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learned to cope with this. Showing understanding and providing support might at the moment be more effective tactics to generate some reciprocity, in due course.