

COVID-19 Crisis Communications: LGBTI Q&A

[Blog](#), [Covid-19](#), [Strategic Communications](#)

After our [blog on crisis communication](#), ILGA-Europe hosted a Q&A call for LGBTI groups to share experiences and advice on communicating clearly during the COVID-19 crisis. Here is a summary and 60-second video of five lessons we learned from each other on that call.

PROTECT ADAPT RALLY

ILGA-Europe's
3-part plan for
the COVID-19 crisis

#TheWorkGoesOn

1 Crisis communications is just one part of the response

Our call focused on how to communicate about COVID-19 from the perspective of an LGBTI group, but we repeatedly discussed how it is not possible to completely separate communications from other organisational tasks. **How your organisation acts externally and internally during a crisis is your crisis communication**, and it does not matter if your COVID-19 statement says one thing if your actions communicate something else.

With this in mind, ILGA-Europe is developing a rounded response package to help the LGBTI movement [‘Protect, Adapt, and Rally’ through the COVID-19 crisis](#). You can find many more resources on questions such as digital security, adapting activities, remote working, and financial management on our website — with more to come.

Covid-19: How to Communicate Clearly as an LGBTI Group

The Covid-19 crisis situation is changing every day, and as an LGBTI organisation you are going to want to keep your audience updated about what specifically matters to them. ILGA-Europe's strategic communications consultant, Sho Konno, gives his key advice for communicating at this time.



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2 Start with the basics of crisis communications

Every crisis is different (do you know any organisation that started 2020 anticipating this scenario?), but the process for effective crisis communication is often exactly the same. In fact, the reason why some groups respond well to crises is arguably *because* they follow the same process, whatever the crisis — having a routine to follow can help give you structure to respond to the unpredictable.

Many participants in the call had different questions, but the first steps to take were often the same:

? **Be brief**

? **Focus on the facts**

? **Stay human**

? **Test it from your audience's perspective**

Our initial [blog on crisis communication](#) has more detail on how to follow those tips, specifically for LGBTI groups during COVID-19.

Dear friends –

We recognize that the COVID-19 situation is changing rapidly, and in this time of uncertainty, wanted to share our current plans:

- In order to minimize contact between people, our Chicago and Charleston offices are closed starting Monday, March 16. Staff will be working remotely, with access to email and voicemail.
- In-person gatherings are postponed, cancelled, or moved to a virtual space for the foreseeable future. If you are a participant in one of those, you will hear from a staff member directly.
- Proposals & reports due March 27th are now **due April 10th**.
- If we provided sponsorship or paid attendance for a conference or event that is cancelled, we will not request a refund.
- We will post updates here - <https://gddf.org/covid19> - and on social media. Any major changes will be sent via this newsletter.

We value the relationships we have with you, and our virtual lines of communication remain open for conversation.

We wish you and your community health and peace of mind.

Sincerely,

David Farren, Executive Director

3 Everyone's a critic (and that can help!)

During the Q&A, we annotated an example together — a mailout that a foundation in the USA had sent their audience. While our participants saw a lot of positives (“clear”, “urgent”, “all the important information for

customers”), we also started to pick apart all the things it could do better (“not empathetic”, “not very two-way”, “no contact for follow-up questions”).

That’s not because it is a bad piece of communication. We chose it precisely because it is a good example sent very early on in the crisis from a small organisation with a communications capacity that is more relatable for most of ILGA-Europe’s members. But it is normally easier to spot what someone else has missed out, or what is not clear to you, than it is to see in your own work.

There are two actions that come out of this lesson for all of us:

? Ask someone who was not involved in writing the communication to **test it from your audience’s perspective**.

? **Forgive ourselves** for the things we will probably miss in our own communications. As long as we remember to stay human, our audiences will understand that humans make mistakes under pressure. We are all in this together.

From Ekaterina:

About alternatives for F
- we can share our link

From Öner:

What we did was talk about
our feelings about the new...

From Lala:

We have created a survey
form to know more about...

From Mariami:

Pay attention to ethnic
minority communities who...

From Herman:

We have developed a series
of new events on Zoom...

From Sören:

What kind of activities can
still create visibility of queer...

From Bob:

What about those who
left without money...

4 Our movement has answers for this moment

The LGBTI movement is strong, deeply connected and has much learning that can help the world at this time. **We have the resilience, creativity and solidarity to strengthen society's response to the pandemic**, and so many of our questions can be answered by each other. Here are examples of participants in the call helping each other on crisis communications:

Questions and tips from the call

"How do we maintain activities but not look like we don't care about people, or the importance of the virus?"

? **Repeat the official general advice** from your local health authorities (do not assume that people have already

heard enough of this).

? **Emphasise that you are continuing your activities** because of the crisis and explain why people need it at this moment. Do not talk as if you are continuing activities in spite of the crisis or it could sound like you are selfishly pursuing ‘distractions’.

? **Include a (short!) message about why you care (do not just state that you care)** to help your audiences understand and empathise with your motivations.

“What about those who are left without money, jobs, or who are at risk of remaining on the street?”

? **Prioritise communication directly** to those who are most vulnerable and marginalised.

? **Governments still have an obligation to protect people and you can hold them accountable** for human rights during this crisis. ILGA-Europe has created briefings on advocacy for affected LGBTI groups and legal obligations of states in our [‘Protect’ resources for COVID-19 response](#).

? **Pay attention to minorities who may have an additional language barrier.** In one country the government is over-reliant on TV, and there was a role for civil society to work with specific communities on a local level.

Ideas from the call

Participants shared some ideas with each other about their actions so far:

? *“What we did was talk about our feelings about the new situation during our online events for the first two weeks and then moved on to other topics, thinking it might be **too much to talk about constantly about the virus.**”*

? *“We developed a series of new events on Zoom. Interviews like ‘10 uncomfortable questions’, psychological and informational training, support groups, lectures. And we try to **involve people in the process** as much as possible.”*

? *“Thinking of alternatives for Prides, etc — we reorganised our theatre initiative as an online initiative. We could share links to this online and think about subtitles and translations.”*

? *“Due to corona we had to cancel all the workshops we were going to do on the concept of building a new queer centre, but we got consultants to help turn it into a survey, and then an **online workshop on Zoom where we worked in small groups** on the results of the survey.”*

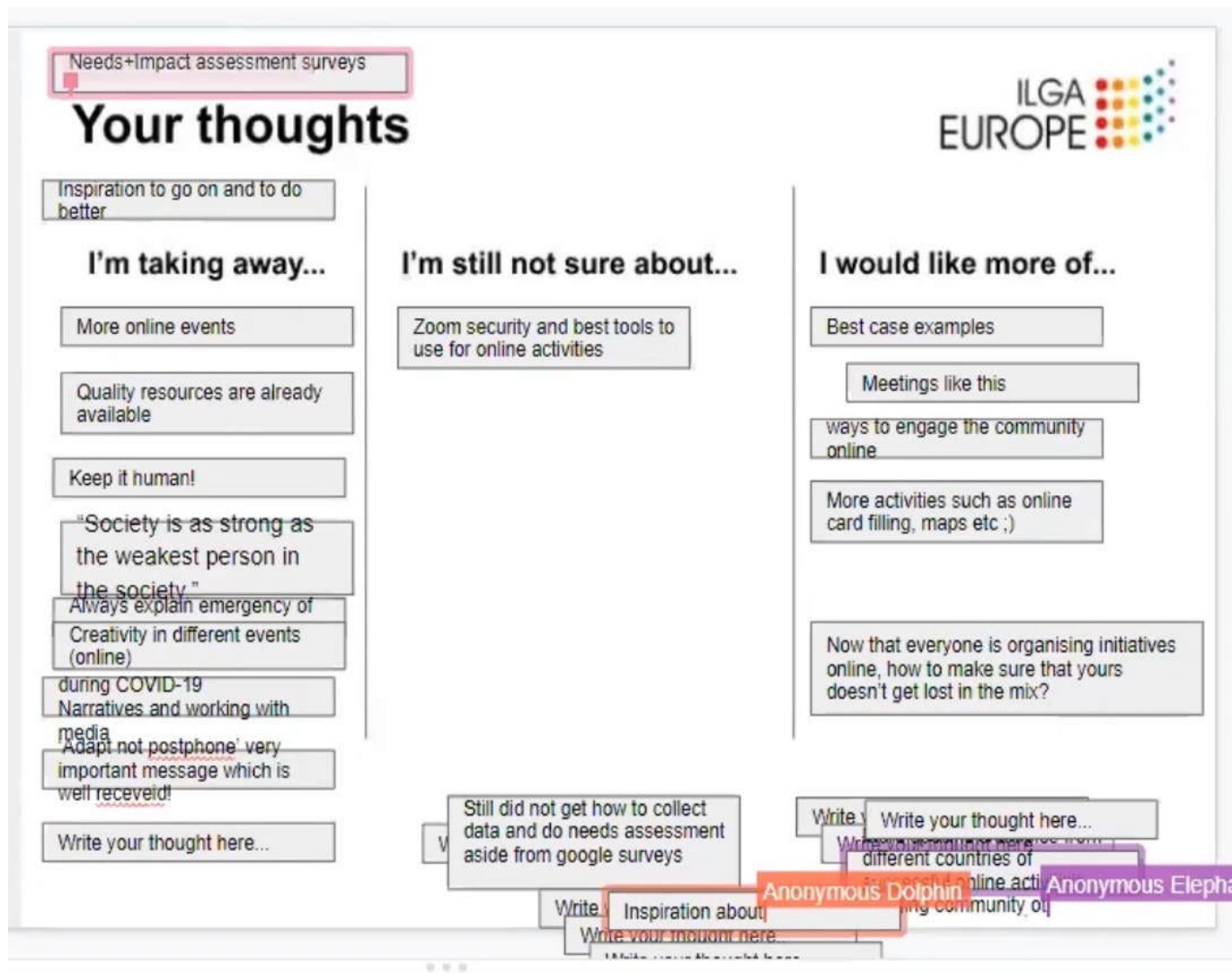
Moving from crisis communication to proactive communication

Some questions moved from reactive crisis communications to questions about how to proactively campaign during this crisis. ILGA-Europe will be sharing more about how we can [‘adapt and rally’](#), but in the meantime do you have suggestions for these questions?

? *We are trying to transform a three-day queer activist camp to an online course — how do we make sure this is effective when we don’t have experience of organising interactive activities online?*

? *How do we get through to the media and stakeholders when all attention is focused on COVID-19?*

? *Now that everyone is organising initiatives online, how do we make sure ours doesn’t get lost in the mix?*



5 We are all learning how to do this together

As the world is rapidly forced to change our daily working practices, this Q&A call itself was a chance to experiment. We had so many registrants and attendees that we had to change format at the last minute, but we managed to keep a couple of activities which helped visualise where everybody was coming from, and give everybody a chance to see each other's feedback, live. It is obviously not the same as being in a room together, but it helps replace some of the benefits of all being able to see each other's faces and each other's post-it notes on flipchart paper.

Our combination of Google Slides and Zoom was inspired by [Training to Change](#), which is a great place to find templates and tips for online (and offline) facilitation.

The last words should go to the participants — thank-you for taking part in this experiment and supporting each

other, we hope to do more with you soon.

“I’m taking away... ‘adapt not postpone’, a very important message, which is well received!”

“I’m taking away... ‘society is only as strong as the weakest person in society’.

“I’m still not sure about... Zoom security and best tools for online activities.”

“I’m still not sure about... activities for people who don’t like cameras or video chat.”

“I would like more... specific examples from different countries of successful online activities, bringing the community together, advocacy, etc.”

“I would like more... meetings like this.

Do you have other questions about communications as an LGBTI activist? Join our new [Facebook](#) group for LGBTI activists in Europe and Central Asia who focus on communication as (part of) their role.