

We Need People In, Not Out

Key Takeaways From a Global
LGBTIQ Movement Roundtable





About Outright

Outright International works with partners around the globe to strengthen the LGBTIQ human rights movement, document and amplify human rights violations against LGBTIQ people, and advocate for inclusion and equality.

Founded in 1990, Outright works with civil society organizations, the United Nations, regional human rights monitoring bodies, governments, humanitarian and development institutions, and philanthropic and corporate partners to create lasting change. With staff in over fifteen countries, Outright holds consultative status at the United Nations, where it serves as the secretariat of the UN LGBTI Core Group.

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I. Background

The global LGBTIQ movement is at a pivotal moment. While funds dry up and some allies turn their backs on us, anti-gender movements are also gaining momentum through hateful narratives, discriminatory laws, and hostile coalitions intent on undoing our gains and advancing their vision of exclusion. These threats are urgent and require immediate responses and renewed solidarity in order to counter their drastic impacts on the lives of LGBTIQ persons, their families, and allies everywhere. At the same time, this moment presents a critical opportunity to come together, reflect, and chart a way forward.

On November 6, 2025, on the sidelines of Outsummit 2025, Outright International convened over 40 LGBTIQ activists, civil society representatives, and partners from 14 countries in an internal movement roundtable. It was held under the Chatham House Rule in order to encourage frank discussions on different approaches, and structured as three 40-minute “fishbowl” discussions on three key topics: **responding to the funding crisis**, **building effective narratives**, and **forging alliances**. Four to five participants, prioritizing frontline activists, were selected to initiate each discussion. Afterward, the fishbowl was opened to other participants, including Outright staff, funders, and institutional partners in the room, to “tap someone out” and join the conversation.

Launching the roundtable, Outright’s Senior Director for Global Programs and Grantmaking, Paul Jansen, commented, “We are one united movement. We won’t let them take that away from us. There’s a lot of uncertainty, but there are also a lot of opportunities. We need each other’s solidarity to get through this.” The roundtable sought to strengthen that solidarity among diverse activists through candid conversations about opportunities and challenges.

This briefing paper summarizes key takeaways from the roundtable: diagnosing pressing **challenges** and their global, national, and local impacts, proposing creative and timely **solutions**, and presenting concrete **best practices** to provide activists with tools and strategies that have been tested and proven in some countries. This paper is based on the notes that a rapporteur took during the event, who, to the best of their ability, reconstructed quotes from speakers.

II. Responding to the Funding Crisis

"The funding crisis has forced us to work together due to fewer human resources and programs that needed to be cut. It forced us to be more creative and operate outside traditional or mainstream grantmaking pathways."

—LGBTIQ activist from **Zambia**

The Challenge

In January 2025, U.S. President Donald Trump started his second term by freezing nearly all foreign assistance. Shortly thereafter, the U.S. State Department and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) prematurely terminated nearly ten thousand grants, including hundreds that reached LGBTIQ organizations, with drastic consequences for efforts to provide critical health services, advocate for human rights and inclusion, and protect communities from violence.¹ Resources upon which LGBTIQ movements depend continue to be at risk, with other governments also reducing or planning to reduce their commitments to fund human rights, gender equality, and development work.² Across regions, activists described the current funding environment as the most severe challenge in years.

Dependency leads to unsustainability. Many LGBTIQ organizations historically relied on HIV-related funding streams. The closure of USAID, the withdrawal of State Department support for human rights work, and cuts to the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) have triggered sudden program closures, salary gaps, and loss of safe community spaces.

In **Uganda**, which passed a draconian anti-LGBTIQ law in 2024, several organizations and community health centers "have been forced to close down," further jeopardizing the lives of LGBTIQ people. A Ugandan activist emphasized that because traditional donor funding is project-based, there has been insufficient investment in movement-building or social and behavior change, with negative implications on movement sustainability.

As an activist from **Saint Lucia** said, this situation "forces us to think about the sustainability of our funding," pointing out that a majority of LGBTIQ organizations in their country do not own

¹ Human Rights Watch, "US: Trump Administration Guts Foreign Aid," February 28, 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/02/28/us-trump-administration-guts-foreign-aid>; Outright International, *Defunding Freedom – Impacts of U.S. Foreign Aid Cuts on LGBTIQ People Worldwide*, February 2025, <https://outrightinternational.org/our-work/human-rights-research/defunding-freedom-impacts-us-foreign-aid-cuts-lgbtqi-people>.

² Global Philanthropy Project, "Holding the Line: Defending LGBTI movements in the 2025 Funding Crisis," March 5, 2025, <https://globalphilanthropyproject.org/coordinatedresponseodacuts>; Human Rights Funders Network, *Funding at a Crossroads Foreign Aid Cuts and Implications for Global Human Rights*, September 2025, <https://www.hrfn.org/foreign-aid-cuts>.

the land and infrastructure that they rely on to operate, and are therefore in danger of losing them.

Activists are exhausted. Activists voiced exhaustion with continual emergencies: “Movements are reflecting on [how to operate with minimal resources] while thinking about being able to afford a home, being reported to the police, and more. We are tired of being resilient...I want to be part of a thriving community, not a resilient one,” said an activist from **Uganda**, describing how queer communities are confronting the funding crisis after dealing with two proposals for anti-LGBTIQ legislation within ten years.

This crisis has labor implications as well, with some organizations reporting brain drain. In **Nepal**, some LGBTIQ activists are pursuing more stable employment, especially in the Gulf, where the human rights situation of LGBTIQ people may be worse. In the **Caribbean**, climate disasters compound financial instability by disrupting services, and movements are losing local activists to Global North-based non-governmental organizations or the private sector.

As activists and community members who worked in human rights, development, or public health are losing their jobs, it is becoming more difficult to pool community resources to deal with the crisis.

The political environment further aggravates the crisis. LGBTIQ organizations’ bank accounts have been frozen in a country that criminalizes LGBTIQ people. In **Nepal**, political attacks on gender-affirming care forced providers to close. Activists also pointed to the transnational nature of the anti-rights backlash, with one activist from Uganda emphasizing that the crisis will continue as long as Global North countries continue to “elect leaders who fuel extremists who export hate to Africa” and other countries in the Global South.

Solutions and Best Practices

This crisis has “forced” community members to think outside the box, according to an activist from **Zambia**.

- Communities should **diversify funding sources** and look into non-traditional funding pathways, social enterprises, and pooled community resources to reduce reliance on traditional donor funding.
- LGBTIQ organizations should **collaborate more with other movements** to navigate the funding crisis, such as by submitting joint grant applications or sharing physical infrastructure and other resources.
 - In **Uganda**, pro bono partnerships with law firms allow groups to prepare litigation in advance so they can “be ready to go to court” when funding arrives.

- In **Nepal**, an LGBTIQ organization partnered with feminist organizations to secure new grants and mainstream LGBTIQ issues into broad work on gender-based violence and the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda.
- Organizations in a country that is cracking down on LGBTIQ people and groups have also been registering their bank accounts through U.S. foundations to navigate state restrictions.
- Funders should **invest in the economic empowerment** of LGBTIQ persons. One activist suggested that sustainability now requires investing in individual capacity, so that “a sick person can go to a private health center instead of relying on NGOs.”
- We must **document our responses** to the crisis to guide future generations.
 - Activists from **Nepal** are producing podcasts and documentaries to create historical memory around our responses to the present crisis as a “long-term investment for movements to come.”
- We should **repurpose our infrastructure** for safety and care and to mobilize community support:
 - Some drop-in centers in **Uganda** that were closed down due to USAID cuts have been converted into safe meeting spaces for mothers of LGBTIQ people to meet, giving activists an opportunity to rally community support.³ Months before the funding freeze, after the Anti-Homosexuality Act was passed into law, some allied mothers turned their homes into discreet service points for HIV medication, allowing community members to get lifesaving aid.

³ See Larissa Kojoué, “Ugandan Mothers Stand by Their LGBT Children,” *Human Rights Watch*, May 8, 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/05/08/ugandan-mothers-stand-their-lgbt-children>.

III. Building Effective Narratives

"Far-right narratives are simpler. It is easier to just resort to fear. For progressives like us who want to be intersectional, we must be careful with our language...Far-right narratives are consistent from Africa to Eastern Europe to the Pacific. They are saying the same things...How do we agree on core messages that we can indigenize and make useful?"

—LGBTIQ activist from **Jamaica**

The Challenge

Far-right narratives are simple, consistent, and backed by power. Participants emphasized that far-right narratives are increasingly unified, well-resourced, and effective. These narratives leverage simple, emotionally charged messages centered on protecting women and children, upholding the family, and defending tradition. Transnational movements and political elites advance and propagate these narratives consistently across much of the world. "Far-right narratives have endless resources," an activist from **Hungary** emphasized.

Anti-LGBTIQ narratives aim to restrict the terms of the debate. As one participant from the **United States** warned, "far-right narratives are controlling the boundaries about what can be said," especially on issues related to trans and intersex people's rights. As a result, they put us in the defensive mode, forcing us to devise counter-narratives that often repeat their messages ("We are not...").

We do not always hit the mark. The language that LGBTIQ movements use can be overtly complex or academic and may not always appeal to the general public. As an activist from **Jamaica** pointed out, "movement language is not community language." Our narratives must mobilize public support and invite people to learn and grow, instead of requiring them to master our language. In some contexts, our failure to "indigenize" terminology related to sexual and gender diversity and use locally appealing frames can backfire, giving fuel to the far-right narrative that LGBTIQ equality is an imposed value.

Solutions and Best Practices

- We should **indigenize and localize** our language and narratives.
 - In the **Pacific**, activists center ancestral or pre-colonial gender diversity, pushing back against narratives portraying queer identities as conflicting with "traditional" norms.

- In **Jamaica**, activists started a history project on the relationship between Jamaican identity and queerness, pointing out that anti-LGBTIQ movements are un-Jamaican and un-Caribbean. They highlighted the Jamaican Carnival not only as an integral part of Jamaican national heritage but also as an “established queer space beloved by all,” foiling far-right narratives against the event.
- We should build **broad narratives** based on shared universal values.
 - In **Hungary**, LGBTIQ activists partnered with pro-democracy and human rights movements to portray the government’s ban on Pride as an attack on fundamental rights and democracy. Budapest Pride in June 2025 became the biggest LGBTIQ demonstration in the history of the country.⁴
 - An activist from the **United States** pointed out that we must “break siloes and lean into shared frames like joy and love. Let’s simplify our language. Terms like SOGIESC [sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics] may be good for an academic paper, but not to build a narrative.”
- Our message must be **fun and inviting**.
 - In **Brazil**, activists created a seven-foot election mascot who is the son of democracy and the Constitution (two lesbians). “People loved it because it was fun, cool, joyous...Join us because we’re cool, we’re fun. Let’s party, instead of blaming people for not using their right to vote...We need people in, not out.”
 - This means allowing our audience to “mess up at first,” according to an intersex activist from the **United States**. They emphasized that, “We must lower the stakes to make people feel that they can mess up at first. We must also make it feel fun along the way.”
- We must be strategic about **reclaiming certain terms** and using our opponents’ words against them.
 - In **Jamaica**, following anti-gender actors’ fearmongering about “the gay agenda,” activists published a “Gay Agenda” manifesto in 2018 with widely agreed-upon demands such as raising the minimum wage and living standards.
 - In **Hungary**, activists have stopped using “sensitizing” to refer to efforts to raise public awareness about gender and other issues, as the far right has weaponized it, turning it into a “scare word.”

⁴ Andrew Higgins, “Budapest Pride Parade Was Bigger Than Ever, Despite Orban’s Ban,” *New York Times*, June 28, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/06/28/world/europe/hungary-orban-gay-pride.html>.

- We must **test our messages**.
 - In **Brazil**, LGBTIQ activists test their messages by seeing if elected officials pick up their messages and communicate them to voters.
 - In **Jamaica**, recognizing the influence of content creators on popular culture, LGBTIQ activists monitor and work with TikTok creators to test and amplify their narratives.

IV. Forging Alliances

"We were so aware of our own suffering that it became so hard to show up for others. We need to acknowledge the suffering that is happening everywhere...Now more than ever, with declining resources, we need to build new alliances."

—LGBTIQ activist from the **United States**

The Challenge

"There is a lot of untapped despair," as a trans activist from the **United States** put it. In some countries, anti-gender groups are also attacking the rights of immigrants and racial, religious, and ethnic minorities. The activist emphasized that "now is the best time" to build solidarity between groups that are marginalized along the lines of class, race, gender, sexuality, and more. An activist from **Taiwan** also affirmed that tapping into the "shared victimization" of marginalized groups can lead to new or stronger alliances.

Concerningly, **some queer movements are becoming less feminist**, while some groups that describe themselves as feminist are turning their backs on queer people. According to a pioneering LGBTIQ activist from **Mexico**, "the LGBTIQ movement used to be very strong, allied with feminist movements and clearly leftist. Now the movement is becoming more individualistic, turning away from feminist movements." They pointed out that "individualism is blocking the way," as some of us "close the door to exchanges" or do not "allow other movements to speak about our issues." This prevents potential partners from seeing the "value of our shared unities." An Outright staff member supervising programmatic work in the Southwestern Asia and North Africa (SWANA) region noted that "some feminists are turning away" from queer issues, as queerphobia persists among the ranks of feminists.

We tend to build alliances after, not before, crises, limiting unity's full potential. The activist from **Mexico** expressed regret that, "Now we are not prepared to work on climate change and poverty because we do not have existing linkages with organizations working on those issues." A trans activist from **Argentina** pointed out that in weak democracies, movements may "lack the strategy to confront what is to come, which is going to be worse, with the rise of the fascist right." They underscored the danger this represents for trans communities in Latin America, where "there is the death penalty for trans women due to ...hate crimes, extreme poverty, structural exclusion, and social death...related to corruption, drug trafficking, and forced migration." While trans and queer people face specific vulnerabilities to these threats, they are also societal problems that other groups struggle with, opening the door to alliances.

Our communities must value alliances and not work in siloes. In **Ghana**, alliances and networks allowed intersex activists to reach radio stations and newspapers and successfully lobby

against efforts to criminalize intersex people through a proposed anti-LGBTIQ bill. An activist from **Taiwan** highlighted that “community members must know we need allies...so they can lead us to new allies” within their circles.

Solutions and Best Practices

- We should **map potential allies** and proactively reach out to build partnerships and coalitions.
 - In **Mexico**, an LGBTIQ organization is identifying and contacting LGBTIQ people working in other movements, such as those against climate change and poverty, as a first step to new partnerships.
- We must rekindle our **traditional alliances** with feminists and other actors for gender justice.
 - In **Nepal**, through the Intergenerational Feminist Forum, LGBTIQ activists are bringing LGBTIQ issues into a broader agenda for gender equality. They also work with other feminist and human rights organizations to jointly engage with multilateral processes such as the Universal Periodic Review.
- We must pursue “**unusual suspects**,” and try to find consensus on some issues.
 - In **Ghana**, intersex activists count some leaders of religious congregations and traditional community leaders as their allies. This year, they spoke in two churches about their issues, prompting a journalist to give them a platform on national television, increasing intersex visibility.
 - In the **United States**, a trans activist suggested that some work can be done with right-wing or conservative politicians, even in this highly polarized political period. They gave the example of the Republican governor of a U.S. state who signed bills opposing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) and gender-affirming health care for minors, but also vetoed a bill seeking to prohibit trans youth from participating in high school sports.⁵
 - A former diplomat shared how they met with Pope Francis and “found compassion and inquiry in that meeting,” highlighting the need to reach across the aisle and find common ground with unusual allies.

⁵ Henry Berg-Brousseau, “BREAKING: Human Rights Campaign Commends Republican Gov. Spencer Cox for Vetoing Anti-Trans Sports Ban,” *Human Rights Campaign*, March 22, 2022, <https://www.hrc.org/press-releases/breaking-human-rights-campaign-commends-republican-gov-spencer-cox-for-vetoing-anti-trans-sports-ban>.

- We must build alliances that tap into **common experiences of exclusion**.
 - In **Taiwan**, activists found common cause with single parents in their advocacy for marriage equality, which led to the country being the first in Asia to recognize same-sex marriages in 2019. They are now working with other marginalized groups, including women, persons with disabilities, and migrant workers, to pass the Equality Act, a comprehensive anti-discrimination law, emphasizing that coalitions should not be “a one-time meeting, but a long-term engagement.”

V. Conclusion

"It is important in this pivotal moment where we have fires to put out everywhere to figure out how to continue building movements."

—LGBTIQ activist from **Uganda**

The roundtable reflected a diversity of views and strategies and did not purport to develop a universal roadmap to change. While anti-gender movements often share a playbook and the funding crisis harms LGBTIQ communities everywhere, LGBTIQ movements possess diverse repertoires of tools, frameworks, and languages, and are confronting these problems head-on based on their specific political, social, and cultural contexts.

One thing is clear: We need spaces to connect, share strategies and resources, and collaborate not just to resist backlash but also to advance our calls. We will continue to ask questions, look for solutions, and seize opportunities.

We will keep our tent broad enough to welcome partners and allies with whom we share a common ground, while never compromising our values. As several participants affirmed, we must keep doing all of these things together as “one, united movement.”

Acknowledgments

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A team of Outright staff coordinated by Zoë Schott, Special Projects Officer, organized this movement roundtable as part of Outsummit 2025, Outright's annual global LGBTIQ convening, which brought together 171 in-person and 403 online attendees representing over 70 countries.

Outright is deeply grateful to the over 40 LGBTIQ activists, allies, and partners who joined the roundtable and shared their stories, perspectives, and strategies. This is a deeply challenging time for our global LGBTIQ movement, and activists took time out of their days to show up and exchange with one another, in the hope that it may contribute to change. Outright will continue to work in solidarity with you for a world in which we are free and equal.



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