

We need a place to “let our guard down for a while and just talk--just exist.”

*“Safe spaces to be who we are without fear of discrimination or hate. ...
Regular community events, but just for us.”*

Data from AHRC’s questions in the Vision 2020 survey

- Out of over 6500 respondents, 76% rated it as important or very important for Arlington to be welcoming for the LGBTQ+ community.
- Out of 6250 respondents, 37% said that Arlington is currently neutral or not welcoming for the LGBTQ+ community.
- 68 respondents said they had experienced discrimination, harassment, or bias in Arlington because of LGBTQ+ identity.
- 471 respondents said that they and people in their household would be more likely to participate in LGBTQ+ activities if Arlington had a single contact person for all LGBTQ+ issues who would maintain an online resources list and calendar of events.

Other select comments from AHRC’s LGBTQIA+ community survey

Some people hadn’t participated in events because they were unaware of them and/or new to the area. One person said “I’ve lived in Arlington for 5 years now and I JUST found out about these resources.” An LGBTQIA+ Commission listed on the Town website would make resources obvious.

The majority of the activities right now are for the youth or elderly, so there’s a gap in offerings for most adults. Many people mentioned there only being events for youth. Many people praised the Queer Book Group. Some mentioned the book group being on a night they can’t attend and there being no other offerings for their age group.

Several people mentioned schedule conflicts for things they wanted to attend. If we offered more activities, more people would find something of interest/find a time to participate that fits.

Some expressed concern that their particular identity wouldn’t be accepted or understood in the existing groups in town that are not LGBTQIA+ specific but are advertised as “welcoming.” Activities housed in safe queer spaces and created and run by queer folks is so necessary, regardless of the best intentions of allies.

- “Did not think they would actually be sophisticated on the topics and, therefore, welcoming in a true sense.”
- “Both of the following work well because they are led by members of the community Rainbow LLI & Robbins Library Queer Book Group. It’s rare something works well when not led by a member of the community, especially when the straight coordinator/facilitator is condescendingly ‘doing for us.’”

Many expressed the need for regular activities not about queer identity but in a safe queer space.

- Looking for “interest-based social gatherings in order to create a social network.”
- “Some sort of hangout would be great. Gatherings that aren’t based around support/talking about what’s wrong, what needs to change, but instead are safe spaces to be who we are without fear of discrimination or hate but without Important Activities. Game night, for instance, or movie night, or book club, or something like that. Regular community events, but just for us.”

Requests for specific additional LGBTQIA+ services from AHRC survey responses

Town LGBTQIA+ Liaison / Website / Advertising / Outreach

- Several people mentioned an LGBTQ+ ombudsperson, single LGBTQ+ contact, or an LGBTQ+ person heading the LGBTQ+ endeavors at the COA/for the Town
- Parent groups / school focus groups / school liaison or representative
- Website for Arlington LGBTQ+ community
- Better publicity for activities, other than just in the town paper
- Town recognition of Pride month with flags and a social gathering, such as an informal picnic in Robbins Park, drag ball open to everyone, town Pride parade, or at least a presence by different town organizations at the Boston Pride parade
- “I was not aware that these organizations had activities for LGBTQIA+. I think this information needs to be available and broadcasted better.”

Activities for people of all ages

- Many mentioned the need for additional activities for queer adults, not just youth or elderly
- Something for LGBTQIA+ families, such as playgroup meet-ups, etc.
- One person said the teen group (Queer Mystic) is a good effort but needs more resources.
- “The focus of this questionnaire and activities by COA in the Senior Center and other organizations elsewhere assumes that this is one coherent group of people all with the same issues and needs.”

Community-building

- “Social activities that would allow community members to meet one another. Would be nice to get to know other LGBTQIA+ people in town.”
- “LGBT adults without children feel isolated.”
- All-ages LGBTQIA+ dance with a really good DJ as part of Town Day
- PFLAG chapter
- Caregiver support or bereavement
- A youth program like BAGLY (<http://bagly.org>)
- Group for families with transgender parents
- More arts activities: queer dance group, queer community theater, queer film series

Other requests and comments

- Free HIV/AIDS testing
- Partnership with homeless shelters to provide housing for LGBTQIA+ homeless youth
- “We often run into the attitude “we’re fine with gay people’ and the buck stops there -- this is not the same as being aware of and reacting to LGBTQIA+ -specific needs and desires.”
- AYCC: Therapists need training and experience in dealing with LGBTQIA+ issues.
- AHS: “It would be helpful for the advisor to be LGBTQIA+. AHS has inadequate gender-neutral restroom facilities for students.”
- Arlington Youth Health & Safety Coalition: “Does not seem to have any programs or activities directly related to LGBTQIA+ needs. At recent mental health and suicide and awareness night at AHS, there was no mention of the heightened risks of LGBTQIA+ teens.”
- Robbins Library: “Great effort at LGBTQIA+ programming, though queer teen group seems [to be mostly a tightknit group of] home-schooled youth (not unexpected since it is this group which initiates the activities)” but additional programming for/efforts to better integrate public school youth would be welcome.

Examples of projects the LGBTQIA+ Rainbow Commission could tackle in its first 2 years

- Address the deficiencies identified in the Human Rights Campaign's Municipal Equality Index
- Be a visible LGBTQIA+ presence at Town Day
- Create an annual Pride Day celebration and/or coordinate participation in Boston Pride
- Work with the Human Rights Commission to draft a report based on the findings of AHRC's LGBTQIA+ community needs survey
- Host a forum for the LGBTQIA+ community to prioritize requests and elicit additional feedback
- Conduct a separate community needs survey for LGBTQIA+ youth
- Explore the possibility of opening a Pride Center in Arlington
- Provide immediate response to support the community in response to tragic events such as the Pulse nightclub shooting in Orlando as well as celebrate positive events such as overturning of anti-LGBTQ laws
- Provide resources and facilitate programming for children of LGBTQIA+ families and for intersex children, who have different needs from those of other LGBTQ youth
- Engage in coalition building in town and beyond so all our minority communities are linked and supported--including helping faith communities work toward becoming welcoming congregations
- Support and educate youth-serving organizations in town (AYCC, Boys and Girls Club, etc.) around issues pertaining to queer youth and children from queer families; act as a bridge to resources in this area and beyond (e.g., help queer youth of color find a mentor from the Hispanic Black Gay Coalition, etc.)
- Curate resource lists and provide education to other town commissions such as the MLK Commission, which could in the future honor Bayard Rustin at an MLK events or could invite an LGBTQ+ speaker, for example