



# NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project

## LGBTQ+ Historic Sites Focus Groups Summary Report

### INTRODUCTION

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The National Committee to Explore LGBTQ+ Site-Based History was convened in 2023 to explore and inventory the landscape of those doing LGBTQ+ site-based historic preservation work. As part of its work, it developed, administered and analyzed data from a national survey among enthusiasts and professionals doing this work leading to a report issued in the spring of 2024. That report is [available here](#).

The report was followed by a series of facilitated focus groups to bring together those that had taken the survey – both to share findings and to gather additional thoughts and suggestions from respondents on the topics covered. This included the possibility of establishing an informal national network.

## ABOUT THE CONVENINGS

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All survey respondents were invited to attend an Informational Session where results of the survey were shared, both in a webinar-styled virtual presentation, as well as in a written report. Following this Informational Session, all participants were invited to attend one or more Focus Groups to share additional ideas about what should happen next.

Focus Group prompt questions included the following:

1. **Geographies and Scope of Efforts:** What have you learned and what more would you like to know about the types and geographies of site-based efforts? What stands out?
2. **Leveraging the Data.** In what ways can we leverage this data for the expansion of this work?
3. **Staying Connected.** What are the potential benefits of connecting with others doing similar work? What are some methods/mechanisms we could employ to stay connected and/or deepen connections. How do we expand and diversify who's doing this work?
4. **Resources Needed.** What resources do you need to support your work?

A total of four Focus Groups were convened over virtual zoom calls in July of 2024, with average of 15 attendees at each, inclusive of facilitators and committee members. The following narrative summarizes the conversation highlights from those four focus groups.

## FOCUS GROUPS – SUMMARY OF KEY THEMES

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### 1. **Expand Efforts.** Expand the scope and reach of LGBTQ+ historic preservation efforts.

- (a) Connect with more people and communities doing this work, especially in less supportive or less visible areas.
  - (i) Example: Explore partnerships with organizations like the APA LGBTQ+ Planning Division.
  - (ii) Open the opportunity to connect LGBTQ+ histories with other underrepresented narratives, like Appalachian or Asian American histories
  - (iii) Discuss the potential to share resources, strategies, and collaborate across different marginalized communities
- (b) Focus on preserving LGBTQ+ histories in parts of the country that are not as welcoming or not as represented in the survey map. Suggestion:
  - (i) Emphasize the importance of capturing the stories and knowledge of long-time LGBTQ+ preservationists and historians before they are lost.

### 2. **Leverage the Survey Data.** Leverage the data and information gathered.

- (a) Share the work through press releases, media features, and reports to raise awareness. Specific Suggestions/Examples:
  - (i) Do a press release or media feature to raise awareness about the diversity of people and geographic spread of LGBTQ+ Historic Preservation efforts.
  - (ii) Publish a report with best practices and principles to assist others in approaching this work.
- (b) Use the information to assist in reinterpreting historic sites and generating additional funding.
- (c) Create a centralized digital repository or website to connect preservationists and various efforts they are engaged in.

3. **Develop Networks and Supports.** Develop a network and support system for those doing this work.
- (a) Establish communication channels like listservs, so preservationists can connect. Specific suggestions/examples:
    - (i) Utilize existing groups/networks like Rainbow Heritage Network to build off of existing infrastructure.
    - (ii) Nest this work under the umbrella of a larger, well-established preservation organization.
  - (b) Facilitate connections and share best practices through forums and convenings.
    - (i) Organize an annual (or more frequent) convening where people can present their projects and learn from each other.
  - (c) Offer ideas for additional support and resources. Specific suggestions/examples cited included:
    - (i) Highlight resources like the Smithsonian's Kameny collection and the "Archives of Sexuality and Gender" from the Gale online archives.
    - (ii) Encourage the use of academic databases, queer periodicals, and other digital archives to uncover pre-1960s histories.
    - (iii) Engage with "Main Street" programs and city/town revitalization initiatives to integrate LGBTQ+ histories.
    - (iv) Explore partnerships with media outlets like Wallpaper magazine to feature LGBTQ+-related content.
  - (d) Support connections between new and experienced preservationists. Specific suggestions/examples:
    - (i) Establish a formal mentoring program to connect seasoned preservationists with newcomers; Explore ways to compensate mentors for their time and expertise.
    - (ii) Leverage partnerships with academic institutions and applying student research; engage students in research projects and provide opportunities for them to get involved with historic sites.

**4. Address specific needs and challenges:** Through the development of toolkits, guides, educational resources and/or hosting convenings and conversations. Specific needs and challenges cited:

- (a) Consider developing an FAQ and best practices list.
- (b) Offer tips, support and suggestions on how to secure funding and gain political/community support for LGBTQ+ preservation efforts
- (c) Navigate issues around designation, owner consent, and pushback against this work. Example:
  - (i) Establish an "emergency hotline" for people to get help when issues arise related to pushback.
  - (ii) Discuss how to handle and present potentially controversial or sensitive information about historical figures.
  - (iii) Support assessing the pros and cons of making sensitive information publicly available versus keeping it protected.
  - (iv) Explore ways to represent and memorialize lost or demolished LGBTQ+ spaces.
- (d) Provide information on how to make efforts more accessible through:
  - (i) Use of story maps, walking tours, and podcasts. Specific ideas:
    1. Could partner with local radio stations to air podcast episodes and increase visibility
    2. Leverage platforms like the Bloomberg Connect app to create interactive digital walking tours and history maps
  - (ii) Integrating digital elements like QR codes, interactive maps, and augmented reality to enhance site-based experiences.
  - (iii) Using public art, place-making, and cultural districts as alternative ways to commemorate LGBTQ+ histories; Develop localized guidebooks, magazines, or "temporary publications" to feature LGBTQ+ histories and sites.