

ALA's LGBTQIA+ Library Workers Taskforce Report

TO: ALA Council

DATE: 2024 Annual Conference, San Diego, CA

RE:

- ACTION REQUESTED
- INFORMATION
- **REPORT**

ACTION REQUESTED/INFORMATION/REPORT: Information/Report and Request for Staff and Committee Continuance

ACTION REQUESTED BY: LGBTQIA+ Library Workers Taskforce

CONTACT PERSON: Kate Alderete

STAFF LIAISON CONTACT: Chase Ollis

BACKGROUND:

Library workers are the lifeblood of every library in America. Without the devotion to access and passion for service that library workers pledge, libraries would fail to meet the needs of their communities.

This deeply important work cannot be done while living on our heels. Library workers who identify as members of the LGBTQIA+ community find themselves in the crosshairs of personal and professional attacks at increasingly alarming rates. As a national organization, the American Library Association must understand the nuance and extent of this problem to muster a thorough and effective response to protect and support those who have been impacted. Only by asking those directly affected, and listening to the stories they share, can ALA begin to understand the extent of this problem and prepare a mighty response.

The ALA LGBTQIA+ Library Workers Taskforce has developed a survey to solicit responses that will inform what resources and tools ALA develops to counter these attacks. The survey, based largely on the Sexism and Racism in the Workplace survey used in the 2023 People of Color in Library and Information Science Summit, thoughtfully and conscientiously asks participants to share their experiences of discrimination and retaliation in the workplace due to their LGBTQIA+ identity. The Taskforce prioritized using inclusive language, leaving space for narrative, and offering participants the option to include their contact information as a way to extend a hand in an often disempowering and lonely experience. The Taskforce hopes that this survey will be the first step on the road to equal protection for all library workers, regardless of sexual identity.

Places within ALA for LGBTQIA+ members have a complicated history with both successes and challenges. The Rainbow Round Table—the oldest LGBTQIA+ professional affiliation—recently celebrated its 50th Anniversary. The 50th celebration aligned with our first out Lesbian ALA President, Emily Drabinski—a presidency that has illuminated the escalated scapegoating of LGBTQIA+ workers in leadership positions.

There has been a sharp uptick in coordinated and organized efforts to censor and ban LGBTQIA+ materials and programming in libraries and to criminalize library workers who have made these materials and programs available to the community. In those efforts, [LGBTQIA+ workers themselves have been targets](#) specifically because of their gender identity and sexual orientation.

The Rainbow Round Table (RRT) has made concerted efforts to safeguard LGBTQIA+ spaces within ALA, for library workers, and for our varied service populations. For example, the RRT crafted and successfully advocated for a Council Resolution that ensured gender-neutral bathrooms at all conferences, coordinated trips to the site of the PULSE massacre during our conference in Orlando, advocated for the growth and visibility of the Stonewall Awards in times of increased pressure to censor LGBTQIA+ voices. RRT also provided the profession with the “Open to All Tool Kit: Serving the LGBTQIA+ Community in Your Library,” and endured the test of time to be the oldest LGBTQIA+ professional organization.

However, we have neglected to track and document such patterns. Recognizing and documenting the impacts of hostility, aggression, and discrimination against LGBTQIA+ library workers and the Association’s need to provide support, two Resolutions were advanced through the ALA Council.

During ALA Special Council Session held on Friday, January 27, 2023, Council approved the following:

APPROVED, Article V, Section 1, Amendment 1 Revise Section 1 to read: Section 1. Composition. The Executive Board of the American Library Association shall consist of fifteen (15) members including: the four (4) officers of the Association, the immediate past president, and ten (10) ALA members elected to three-year (3-year) terms as follows: A. three (3) at-large members; B. two (2) division members; C. one (1) round table member; **D. one (1) Rainbow Round Table member**; E. one (1) chapter member; F. one (1) American Association of School Librarians member; and G. one (1) member from one (1) of the National Associations of Librarians of Color (NALCo). All Executive Board members must be active members of the American Library Association. Executive Board members not serving in at-large roles must be current members of the division, round table, chapter, or association designated above.

During ALA Council Session held on Sunday, June 25, 2023, Council approved the following:

ADOPTED, ALA CD# 58, Resolution Condemning Discrimination Against Library Workers and Supporting the LGBTQIA+ Community Resolved, that the American

Library Association (ALA), on behalf of its members: 1. Release a public statement condemning the wrongful terminations of library workers and all efforts to discriminate against library workers on the basis of gender, sexual orientation, including the intersectionality with other state and federally protected classes. 2. Create a Taskforce to determine a strategy for addressing and tracking retaliatory employment cases against LGBTQIA+ library workers and develop a communications plan that highlights ALA's available resources specific to the LGBTQIA+ library worker community. The Taskforce will have representation from but not limited to the Rainbow Round Table, Committee on Diversity, Committee on Library Advocacy, and Committee on Legislation. The Taskforce shall report their findings and recommendations to the ALA Council at the Annual Conference in 2024.

These historic changes both to the Executive Board and the creation of this Taskforce both overwhelmingly passed Council vote in order to ensure representation of the LGBTQIA+ community within ALA's organizational governance.

The ALA Council approved the formation of the LGBTQIA+ Library Workers Taskforce, composed of experts and stakeholders, at the ALA Annual Conference in 2023. This is the report resulting from that Taskforce.

Members of the Taskforce

The LGBTQIA+ Library Workers Taskforce comprises member leaders who have diligently served to fulfill the group's mission. These members represent a broad cross-section of expertise in the library and information sciences profession:

- Kate Alderete
- Nicholae Cline
- Virginia Cononie
- Sukrit Goswami
- Sharaya Olmeda
- Nadia Orozco-Sahi
- Deb Sica

Gathering Information

The Taskforce notes a lack of visibility and readily available ALA resources for LGBTQIA+ library workers facing discrimination in the workplace.

Several Google searches were conducted to determine what ALA-specific resources are available

Search terms included:

- "LGBTQIA+ library workers" - The first result was a link to the ALA's press release on this Taskforce.

- “gay library worker” - Only the ALA’s press release on this Taskforce populating in results, and listed 7th in the result list.
- “gay libraries”- Yielded the ALA’s press release on the Taskforce, but nothing else from the ALA.
- “lgbtq+ library” - Yielded the ALA’s press release on the Taskforce, but nothing else from the ALA.
- “queer library worker” - Brought up a link to Intersections Zine out of ODLIS.
- “queer librarian” - Brought up a link to Intersections but was the eighth entry in the result list.
- “gay librarian”- Did not bring any ALA resources up.
- “trans discrimination library” - Brought up the ALA’s statement affirming the rights of transgender people as the first result and the press release regarding this Taskforce as the second result.
- “gay discrimination library” - Brought up the ALA’s page on Access to Library Resources and Services Regardless of Sex, Gender Identity, Gender Expression, or Sexual Orientation... on the Library Bill of Rights - Interpretations of the Library Bill of Rights pages on ALA’s website.

A slew of other search terms were used in an attempt to replicate what a library worker in crisis might Google for immediate assistance. The Taskforce notes that after using various terms referencing “library” and LGBTQIA+ community, ALA woefully lacks helpful and relevant resources, highlighting a need for ALA to be more visible and offer more resources to LGBTQIA+ library workers.

Questionnaire

The Taskforce collaboratively created a questionnaire designed to gather information relevant to LGBTQIA+ library workers who have experienced, or are experiencing, discrimination in the workplace. The questions were workshopped in several meetings with input from various members of the Taskforce.

Following this initial draft stage, the Taskforce sent the draft questionnaire to several ALA-affiliated groups for feedback, including APALA, BCALA, CALA, REFORMA, and RRT leadership. The feedback period was open for 10 days. No Feedback was received. *See Addendum.*

Questionnaire Final Draft

This questionnaire is designed by the American Library Association LGBTQIA+ Library Workers Taskforce. The Taskforce is charged with determining a strategy for tracking and addressing retaliatory employment cases against LGBTQIA+ library workers and developing a communications plan that highlights ALA resources that support LGBTQIA+ library workers.

The purpose of the survey is to collect information from individuals who identify as LGBTQIA+ and have experienced discrimination in the workplace because of their sexual orientation and gender expression. Responses to this survey will inform how we

address, and respond to, discrimination targeted at LGBTQIA+ library workers. Participant's identifying information will be kept confidential, and respondents may choose to omit any identifying information when completing the questionnaire.

The Taskforce acknowledges that describing situations where discrimination has occurred can resurface traumatic experiences and that recounting these events can further the pain of discrimination. The Taskforce's intentions are to gather information and find healing in shared community spaces.

1. Would you consider yourself part of the LGBTQIA+ Community?
1. How long have you worked in libraries?
2. What type of library do you work in: academic, public, school, tribal, government, special, archives, prison, other.
3. What type of community do you work in? Rural, urban, tribal, suburban, other, all that apply.
4. What state, province, or region are you located in?
5. Have you experienced discrimination in your workplace due to your LGBTQIA+ status including microaggressions? Please check all that apply: pay inequity, promotional opportunities, hostile work environment, microaggressions, other.
6. Was the discrimination you experienced internal from the Library itself, or external from the community, nonprofit organizations, religious, political, or other groups?
7. Was the discrimination due to (check all that apply) library material, bathroom policies, library programming, dress codes, pronouns, marital or relationship status, homophobia or transphobia, political affiliation, or other?
8. Please tell us about your experience. Some examples may include: being forced to remove items, cancel programs, change in personal schedule or job duties, or other.
9. What was the outcome of the discrimination you faced? Are you still working in libraries? If not, did you leave voluntarily? Have you considered changing careers due to this experience?
10. Can you describe the impact this experience had on you? Emotionally, financially, professionally, family, etc.?
11. Did you use any ALA resources to respond to discrimination in the workplace? If yes, what resources did you use? What resources did you find most valuable? Did you connect with any specific office within ALA?
12. Did you have any support outside of ALA? If yes, what helped the most? If not, what do you wish would have been available to you?
13. Are there protections in place for LGBTQIA+ library workers in your state, library, or State ALA chapter? Are they effective?
14. In your opinion, what can ALA do to help prevent discrimination toward LGBTQIA+ library workers?
15. Is there anything else you want to share?
16. If you would like to receive additional information or resources, please share your name and contact information.

Recommendations and Communication Plan

The questionnaire developed by the Taskforce is a tool that can be used to gather much needed qualitative and quantitative data regarding the lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ library workers.

As such, the Taskforce recommends that the questionnaire be converted into an online survey and, following its approval by the Executive Board, be widely distributed via ALA Connect, membership listservs, and stakeholder listservs including ALA affiliates within the Joint Council of Librarians of Color. The survey and data thereafter should be collected, analyzed, used, and distributed as necessary by the Office of Diversity, Literacy, and Outreach Services (ODLOS). The survey should be offered when LGBTQIA+ library workers contact ODLOS for support when dealing with discrimination based on gender identity and sexual orientation and be added to ODLOS's resource webpage. The survey and other ODLOS resources should be made readily available to the Office of Intellectual Freedom, Rainbow Roundtable, and other ALA-affiliated divisions and offices dealing specifically with discriminatory practices in the workplace and censorship activities in libraries.

The Taskforce submits as an example the following survey: [Sample Survey](#). This survey was developed to guide the research for a presentation developed for the 2023 People of Color in Library and Information Science Summit and is intended to gather information regarding discrimination in the workplace on the basis of sex and race. The Taskforce recommends that a survey be developed using the questionnaire provided on a platform that can easily be disseminated to ALA members and provides data analytics.

Charge of Action

The Taskforce recommends the following actions:

1. that ALA implement the survey to inform further data collection on this topic. The survey should be widely distributed and then given to ODLOS to track, analyze, and institutionalize support for LGBTQIA+ library workers in an ongoing and sustainable manner.
2. that ODLOS centralize organization-wide resources and make them accessible to all.
3. that a committee be formed to analyze and gather resources and if there is an absence of resources, that resources be developed.
4. that the ALA Board of Directors' Rainbow Roundtable and NALCo representatives work directly with this committee to ensure the development and establishment of centralized and ongoing resources.

Addendum:

Email Request to Review Survey Questionnaire

Distributed to Leadership of APALA, BCALA, CALA, REFORMA, and RRT

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Dear Friends and Colleagues – Last June, ALA Council voted to create the **LGBTQIA+ Library Workers Taskforce** with a twofold charge:

1. Determine a strategy for addressing and tracking retaliatory employment cases against LGBTQIA+ library workers.
2. Develop a communications plan that highlights ALA's available resources specific to the LGBTQIA+ library worker community.

For the **first part** of our charge, our Taskforce created a survey to solicit confidential information. Whether you are impacted by a lived discriminatory experience due to your LGBTQIA+ identity or are a valued ally in intersectionality, we hope you will provide input on this survey prior to distribution.

We are also looking for people to champion this survey once it is ready for distribution. Our goal is to mass distribute it across ALA and to as many library workers as possible. If not you, please consider referring this email to someone in your sphere of influence who is willing to help champion this work.

For the **second part** of our charge, we would like to learn about the specific ALA resources you use to support LGBTQIA+ library workers. If you don't know of any, that, too, is very telling and informative.

We appreciate your time and consideration. Please respond directly to me at dsica@aclibrary.org by Friday, March 29th. Thank you for taking a moment to acknowledge and support LGBTQIA+ Library Workers in these challenging times.