

FOSTERING PRIDE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The Road to Inclusion

March 2021





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Success for every organisation - including our own - hinges on the ability to elevate diversity of thought, to challenge established mindsets, and to unlock solutions that enable organisations to thrive. To reflect fully the world in which we work and to achieve sustainable impact, we recruit passionate, open-minded people of all gender identities, sexual orientations, ethnicities, physical abilities, and experience, and offer employees global affinity networks for gender and LGBTQ+ identity as well as regional networks addressing race, ethnicity, disability, military veterans, and other dimensions. We focus on intersectionality across these networks and provide affiliation, networking, mentorship, and access to senior leaders. Additionally, we offer diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) consulting and provide customised tools to guide decision making, as we work alongside our clients on their DEI strategies and partner with leading organisations across the globe to learn from those that are best in class and contribute to the evolving dialogue regarding DEI among other initiatives.



Pride Circle Foundation is a not-for-profit enterprise that addresses the needs of the LGBTQ+ community. The concept of a fair and equal society, where everyone can achieve their full potential, lies at the core of the Foundation's ethos.

Pride Circle Foundation has four major streams of activity:

- Employability: The skills, knowledge and self-belief of the community are enhanced through youth and campus engagement; skills development; and fellowship and leadership development.
- Organisational Inclusion: Design of interventions and measure of culture and practices through workplace equality programmes; inclusive best practices; and skill enhancement along with employment support.
- Institutions and Families: Working towards creating a welcoming, affirming and supportive environment. This is attempted through teacher training and parent support to create safe and caring homes.
- Entrepreneurship: Enabling networking, economic opportunities and advancement by organising or supporting financial literacy and inclusion programmes; seed funding and incubation; and supplier diversity.

Pride Circle Foundation's focus is on education, mental health, entrepreneurship, employment and allied activities which it delivers through the aforementioned objectives.



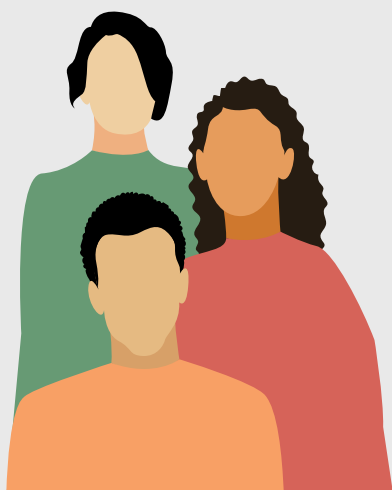
Established in 1961, the Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad (IIM Ahmedabad) is recognised globally for excellence in management education. One of the top management schools in the world, Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad educates leaders of the enterprises.

The Institute's strategic priorities include: strengthening connection with its various constituencies, including academics, practitioners, alumni, and the community; nurturing a high performance work environment of stretch, autonomy, and teamwork; and strategic growth while maintaining emphasis on quality.

Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad has been ranked as the #1 management institute as per the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) 2020 rankings of the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India. The flagship Post Graduate Programme (PGP) is ranked 21st in the Financial Times Masters in Management Ranking 2019. As per the Financial Times' Global MBA Ranking 2020, Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad's Post Graduate Programme for Executives (PGPX) is ranked 61st in the world.

Contents

Foreword	04
Abstract	06
Introduction	07
01 : LGBTQ+ Inclusion in Indian Campuses	08
02 : Nuances of LGBTQ+ Acceptance	12
03 : Current LGBTQ+ Support Infrastructure	20
04 : A Six-step Journey to Inclusivity	24
05 : Conclusion	34
Note to the Reader	38
For Further Contact	39



FOREWORD



Parmesh Shahani

Vice President, Godrej Industries Ltd.

Author of Queeristan: LGBTQ Inclusion in the Indian Workplace (2020)

It is always a pleasure when friends come together to create magic! This vital report has been brought together by the coalition between a company (BCG), an educational institution (IIM Ahmedabad) and an LGBTQ+ change agent (Pride Circle Foundation) — and these are exactly the kind of partnerships, I argue in my book Queeristan, that are going to move the inclusion agenda forward in India. Kudos to the three of you!

Post the Supreme Court verdict decriminalising homosexuality in India, there is a misguided assumption among so many people that all is well with our LGBTQ+ citizens. This is simply not true! Decriminalisation does not mean equality, and even with the law, there are still many further battles to be won, like the modification of The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, or marriage equality. I firmly believe that along with legal change, one of the bastions of change will be the inclusive environment we can create in our workplaces and educational institutions, which is why I wrote Queeristan. Now, one of the key challenges in doing research for the book was to find data that was relevant in an Indian context. The reports produced over the years have been few and far between, like the 2016 survey of LGBTQ+ inclusion done by the MINGLE voluntary group about workplace inclusion, of which Ram of Pride Circle Foundation was a vital part.

This is why this particular report is so important. It tells us about what is happening on the ground in our own backyard, in our college campuses, where young minds and hearts are shaped, and the numbers, as the report reveals, are not at all good. Sixty four per cent (64%) of even 'out' students face discrimination in their colleges? Is it no wonder then, that 79% of students prefer to remain closeted, even when there is institutional support present? This report indicates to us clearly that we have our work cut out for us.

We have to step up the creation of platforms, policies and cultural processes to create more empowering environments for our queer citizens and shift these numbers. All the data indicates that LGBTQ+ inclusion is good for the economy, for innovation, for morale...whatever way you look at it, and we simply cannot have colleges (that will in turn feed into workplaces) of the future in which a majority of queer individuals continue to feel discriminated against. It's not healthy, and it is really bad for the future economic prosperity of our nation.

As you read this report, if you are a college administrator, I want you to think of how you can use it. Understand the five dimensions of LGBTQ+ acceptance, and follow the six steps. Recognise how important LGBTQ+ support groups are, and start the formation of one in your own organisation. If you work in HR, use this report too, to understand how you can create a better environment for your future talent. If you are a queer student, recognise that you are not alone. And if you are straight, realise that you need to be a good ally to our queer community. Whatever you are and wherever you might be located, this report is a call to action, and I really want you to roll up your sleeves and start the process RIGHT NOW!



Prof. Errol D'Souza
Director, IIM Ahmedabad

I firmly believe that it is our moral responsibility to champion diversity and inclusion within our educational institutions. It is unfortunate that the LGBTQ+ community is often missed out of conversations. We should keep in mind that when we treat people differently not because of the harm they are doing to others but because they are different, then we tread down the path whereby freedoms begin to erode.

At IIM Ahmedabad, we are committed to valuing diversity and to cherishing others regardless of their family background, different abilities, language, skin colour, religion, gender, caste, sexual orientation, and age. An inclusive culture is indispensable for students to be who they are, openly express themselves, and grow holistically. It is imperative that a culture is sustained whereby students do not experience victimisation, microaggression, stress, anxiety, and impediments to self-acceptance.

This report presents the landscape of LGBTQ+ inclusion across Indian campuses, offers evidence on how having support groups helps, and provides actionable recommendation for the way forward. While IIM Ahmedabad continues to move ahead in its inclusivity journey, we hope many other colleges also embark and progress towards becoming LGBTQ+ inclusive through this report.



Ramkrishna Sinha
Co-founder, Pride Circle Foundation

Bullying, harassment and discrimination can leave deep scars and negatively impact an individual's life. They erode self-esteem, isolate the individual, and rob them of opportunities for growth, and these effects of bullying stay long after the bullying has stopped. It is imperative that educational institutions provide a safe space for LGBTQ+ students, where they can focus on their growth and participate fully in campus life instead of spending energies trying to cover and hide.

This report provides deep insights into the experiences of LGBTQ+ students and provides a tool-kit for campuses to progress on LGBTQ+ inclusion.

There is hope with multiple colleges taking affirmative action by setting up Support Networks. This needs to be adopted by colleges across the country so that no student is left behind. Pride Circle Foundation is committed to action for inclusion and this report is one step in that direction. It has been an honour to co-write this with BCG & IIM Ahmedabad.

We really hope this report provides you with a roadmap to progress on LGBTQ+ inclusion in your college. We encourage you to initiate a step towards inclusion. We are in this together.



Seema Bansal
Partner and Director, Social Impact, BCG

At BCG, we recognise that our one and only lasting asset is our talent pool. Hence, being able to attract and retain the most talented people out there, no matter what gender, colour, religion, or sexual orientation they come from, is the biggest strategic advantage that we can build for ourselves. We don't think of diversity and inclusion as a 'good-to-do' or a 'responsible corporate citizen' act; we think of it as a core strategic pillar that will make us stronger and more competitive in the marketplace.

With this background, over the last two decades we have focused extensively on a range of diversity initiatives. Pride@BCG (BCG's LGBTQ+ inclusion initiative) has been active for over 20 years globally and 5 years in India. It is our endeavour within this initiative to not only look inside BCG, but also to look outside – especially towards the campus pools from where we recruit. Because it's only when these pools are adequately diverse and attract the best talent that we will be able to in turn access the talent.

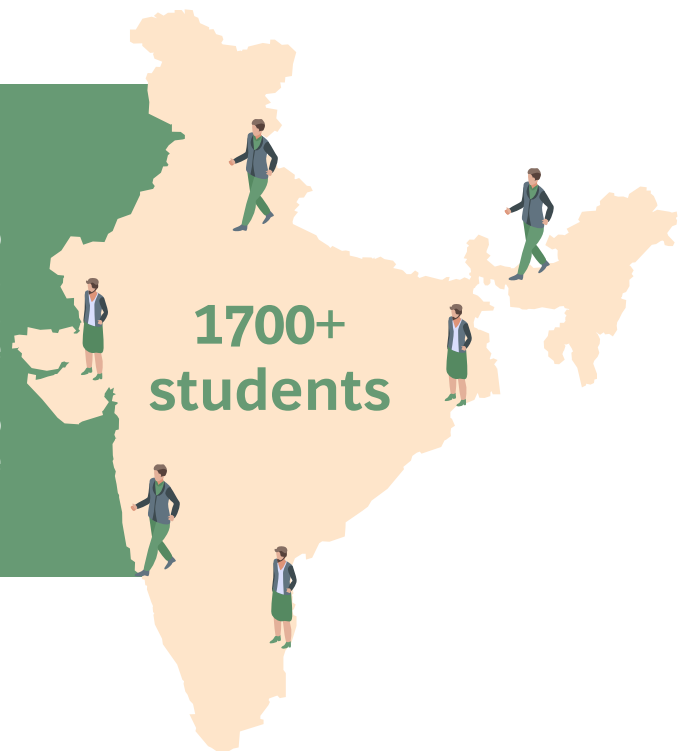
It has been our pleasure to co-write this report with Pride Circle Foundation and IIM Ahmedabad. It is our sincere hope that the initiatives described in this report are adopted across campuses in India and elsewhere. We look forward to being a part of this journey now and in times to come.

Abstract

This report has been prepared collectively by



The report examines inclusivity issues around the LGBTQ+ community in Indian campuses. It draws on a survey of over 1700 students in colleges across India and segregates the data to assess parameters such as satisfaction levels, discrimination, social exclusion and victimisation, among others. Some of these parameters are largely subjective; however, an attempt has been made to develop a criteria to classify them into broad groups. The report quantifies the difference across these parameters in institutions with and without support groups.



‘Inclusivity’ for the LGBTQ+ community is taken as representation for members in an environment where they feel belonged, safe and comfortable to express their identity.

The students were surveyed about forms of direct and indirect discrimination towards themselves or other community members. The awareness of students about LGBTQ+ issues was ascertained across campuses. They were asked to share their personal beliefs and biases about the LGBTQ+ community. Apprehensions and acceptance levels were examined.

Case studies have been presented about the formation and relevance of support groups.

Introduction

- ● The years between 18 and 22 are critical for development. This is the time when many students start moving away from their homes, and almost all students begin to emerge out of the cocoon of parental influence. The ambience they are exposed to during these years plays a decisive role in shaping who they become in the future. It is therefore imperative to foster a safe and inclusive environment for all students for the overall health of society.
- ● However, these years can be disconcerting for LGBTQ+ students. Lack of an inclusive environment can seriously hamper their future growth. Many of them may have talent and potential that can get stifled due to the challenges they face in college.

But there is hope. College support groups have been instrumental in driving LGBTQ+ inclusion in campuses. Beneficiaries of such groups have expressed satisfaction in their personal and professional lives in college.



This report describes one of the first pan-India studies to understand the current situation of the LGBTQ+ community in universities. The objective of the study is to improve the experience of the community through the establishment of support groups. It highlights the ground-realities of the challenges faced by the LGBTQ+ community in Indian colleges. It underscores their expectations from various campus stakeholders, examines why many of them are reluctant to reveal their identity, and identifies ways of setting up support groups to create a more inclusive learning environment that can offer all students a good experience of campus life.





01

01

LGBTQ+ Inclusion in Indian Campuses



01

LGBTQ+ Inclusion in Indian Campuses

The term 'inclusion' means that every person in a group should feel accepted and have a voice through representation. In the case of the LGBTQ+ community, it further implies representation in an environment where members feel belonged, safe and comfortable to express their identity. An inclusive environment will foster growth in the personal and professional lives of all individuals without discrimination of any kind.

This study by Boston Consulting Group, Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad and Pride Circle Foundation attempts to gauge the current situation of the LGBTQ+ community in Indian institutions. It is the first of its kind in India. As part of the study, over 1700 students across colleges in India were surveyed to understand the level of acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community.

The study revealed that 64%, or almost two thirds, of community members who were 'out' to everyone, felt that they have either been discriminated against, or have seen other community members facing discrimination. There were others who were not 'out', who also faced discrimination.



Exhibit 01:

LGBTQ+ members are often unable to 'come out' with their identity



64%

Members who were 'out' to everyone, felt that they have either been discriminated against, or have seen other community members facing discrimination

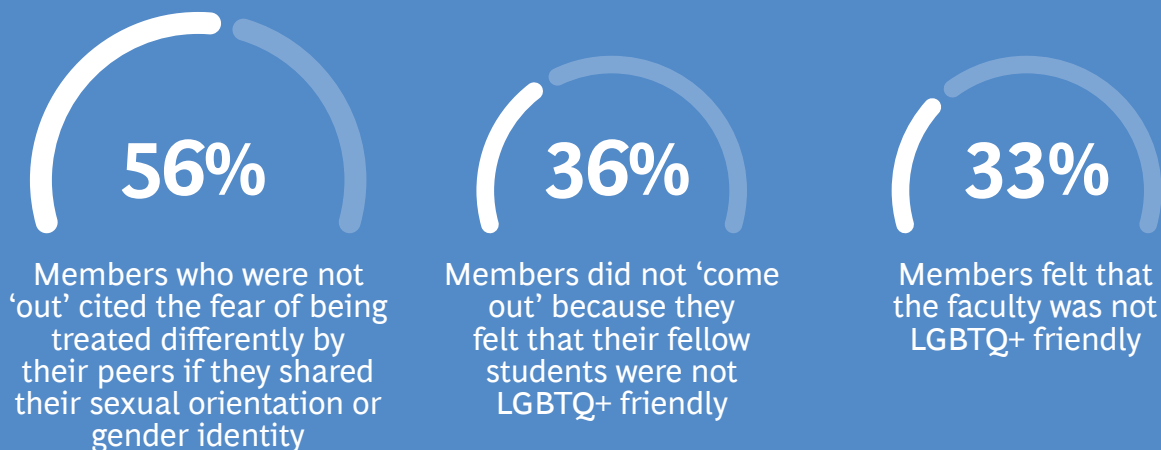
Exhibit 02: Those who are 'out' faced discrimination in various forms



Such behaviour by fellow students shows lack of sensitivity and awareness and instils a sense of fear among LGBTQ+ members.



Exhibit 03: Members who did not reveal their identity cited the fear of being treated differently by their peers



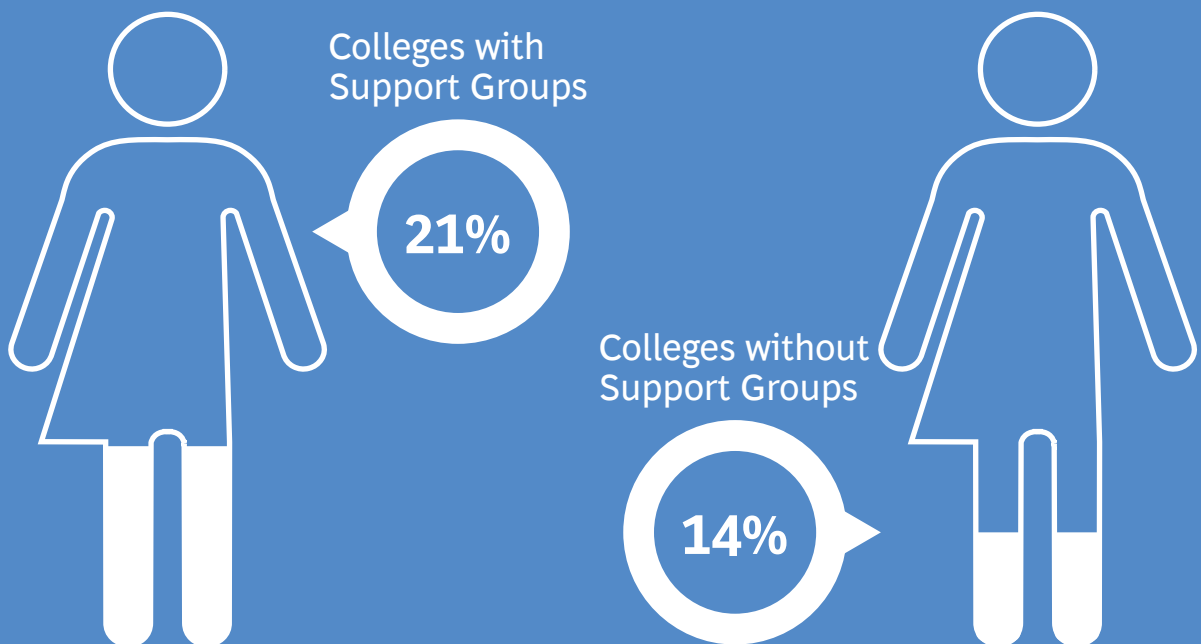
For these reasons, even in colleges with support groups, only 21% of LGBTQ+ students were felt comfortable to share their identity. The number drops to 14% in colleges without support groups. It is evident that the presence of a support group empowers students to 'come out' openly about their gender identity. It was also found that a higher percentage of community members who are 'out' face discrimination in colleges without support groups.



Hence, it is seen that the presence of support groups creates a more favourable and safer environment for LGBTQ+ students to 'come out' openly with their identity.



Exhibit 04: % of LGBTQ+ students willing to come out

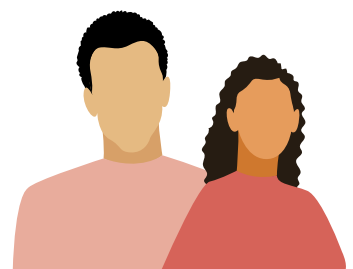




02

02

Nuances of LGBTQ+ Acceptance

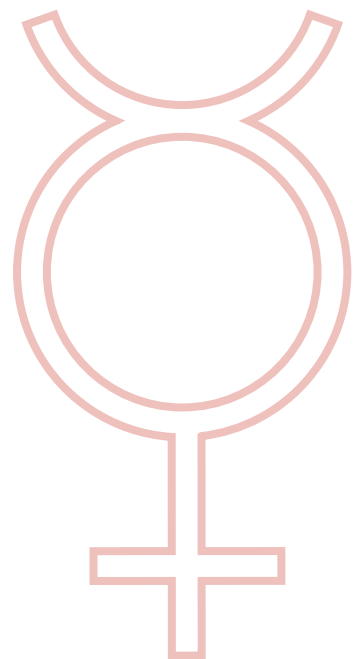


02

Nuances of LGBTQ+ Acceptance

Acceptance of minority groups has always been a contentious issue across societies. Additionally, when it comes to sexual minorities, the sentiment is fraught with ignorance and social bias. To understand the level of LGBTQ+ acceptance by non-community members, the latter were interviewed on five dimensions.

Exhibit 05: Five Dimensions of LGBTQ+ acceptance



01 Awareness

This dimension includes knowledge about the community, their issues, and the laws pertaining to them.

- Ninety-seven per cent (97%) of respondents knew what the term LGBTQ+ meant. But many of them lacked awareness about the laws in the country that impact the community and about LGBTQ+ leaders
- Only 30% of non-community members were aware that a single man can adopt a child in India. This response was similar in colleges with and without support groups
- Only 35% of them knew of a corporate leader who identified as part of the LGBTQ+ community. Again, this response was similar in both colleges with and without support groups



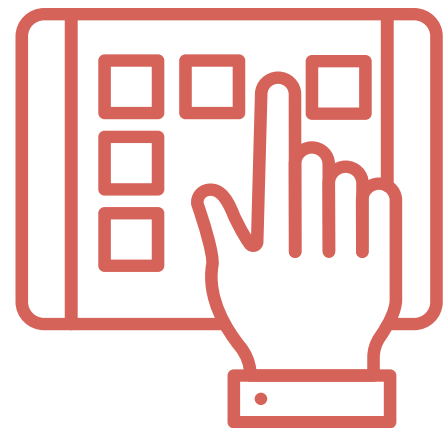
This shows that while most people have surface-level knowledge about the LGBTQ+ community, a vast majority does not have insight into topics or themes that impact the lives of community members.



02 Perception

This attribute measures an individual's personal beliefs and biases about homosexuality. Our findings showed that the dominant belief in colleges and universities is biased against LGBTQ+ members.

- Thirteen per cent (13%) of students in colleges with support groups believed that homosexuality is either unnatural, or a disease, or both; or they had not made up their mind about the subject. This number rose to 21% in colleges without support groups
- Over 65% of non-community respondents either believed that an LGBTQ+ person can willingly change their sexual orientation, or were unsure about it
- About 85% of non-community members felt that being an LGBTQ+ member definitely or probably did not affect the person's performance in the workplace due to unfavourable social situations or stigma



A large number of non-community members have incorrect and regressive perceptions about the community. Further, there is a yawning gap in the understanding of the challenges faced by community members.



03 Acceptance at the Societal Level

This is the most basic form of acceptance, merely calling for equal rights under the law for the LGBTQ+ community. It recognises members of the community as members of society.

- Eighty-four per cent (84%) of respondents in colleges with support groups strongly believed that marriage between same-sex couples should be legal. This figure drops to 72% in institutions without a support group
- Ninety per cent (90%) of non-community respondents felt that same-sex couples should be allowed to adopt children



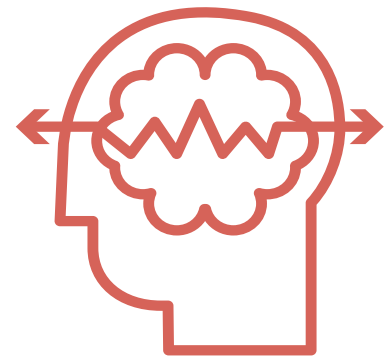
Although a majority of non-community members displayed positive acceptance at the societal level, the study showed that some students still have apprehensions in giving the LGBTQ+ community equal rights. It was also found that students from colleges with support groups tend to be more accepting of the LGBTQ+ community at the societal level.



04 Acceptance at the Personal Level

This level of acceptance involves admitting members of the LGBTQ+ community into a person's close group of family and friends.

- In colleges with support groups, half the respondents stated that they would immediately accept their child revealing that they are a member of the LGBTQ+ community. This number dropped to 41% in colleges without support groups
- In colleges with support groups, 59% of respondents said that they would be comfortable with an LGBTQ+ roommate. In colleges without support groups, 49% stated the same
- An ally of the LGBTQ+ community can be defined as someone who believes in gender equality and stands up for the community. Ninety-one per cent (91%) of non-community members identified themselves as allies. But the statistics above suggest that people have not imbibed the true spirit of being an ally



There is a clear difference between the acceptance levels of students in colleges with and without support groups. Students in colleges with support groups tend to be more accepting at a personal level. This difference points to the likelihood that support groups create awareness and dispel stereotypes.



05 Active Support

Active support can be characterised by a proactive effort to foster LGBTQ+ inclusion.

- In colleges with support groups, more than **three-fourths** of respondents stated that they would probably or definitely participate in an event organised to create awareness about LGBTQ+ inclusion. In colleges without support groups, **two-thirds** of those surveyed would do the same
- Thirty eight per cent (**38%**) of the respondents in colleges with support groups disclosed that they had called their parents out on discriminatory statements against the LGBTQ+ community. The corresponding number in colleges without support groups was **27%**
- About **57%** of the participants in colleges with support groups stated that they have had a conversation about the LGBTQ+ issue with their parents. Their counterparts in colleges without support groups amount to **40%**
- Students in colleges that have support groups are more active in demonstrating their support for the LGBTQ+ community through participation in events and education of persons close to them



The discussion above points to the fact that colleges with support groups show increased engagement and participation in LGBTQ+ initiatives by non-community members compared to those without such groups.



In colleges with support groups, 81% of community members and 93% of non-community members perceived their college to be accepting of the LGBTQ+ community. In colleges without support groups, a mere 43% of community members and 73% of non-community members carried the same perception.

The presence of support groups strongly correlates with the creation of a more inclusive college.



A Deep Dive into the Experiences of the LGBTQ+ Community on Campuses

Students who do not feel accepted by their peers find themselves unable to grow to their true potential. Discrimination against the LGBTQ+ community impacts their learning experience and overall well-being. They find college to be significantly less safe when compared with their non-community counterparts, both with respect to instructors and peers. They are unable to 'be' themselves and as a result do not have a satisfying personal and professional life.

Our study required LGBTQ+ students to rate their experiences in college.



'Being Oneself': Would students agree with the statement "I can be myself among my college peers"? Our study revealed that only **50%** of community members agreed with it, as against **76%** of non-community members



Peer Support: Fifty-five per cent (**55%**) of community members felt that their fellow students helped create a safe environment in college; **72%** of non-community members felt the same



Instructor Support: Sixty per cent (**60%**) of the community members felt that their instructors created a safe space for them; this number rises to **75%** for non-community members



Exhibit 06: LGBTQ+ college experience rating snapshot

Agreed with "I can be myself among my college peers"

50%

76%

Felt that their fellow students helped create a safe environment in college

55%

72%

Felt that their instructors created a safe space for them

60%

75%



Non-community Members

Community Members





Satisfaction and Happiness: In colleges with support groups, **32%** of community members said that they were extremely satisfied with their personal and professional life in college. The corresponding figure in colleges without support groups is **17%**

Exhibit 07:

Overall satisfaction of community members almost doubled in colleges with a Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) support group



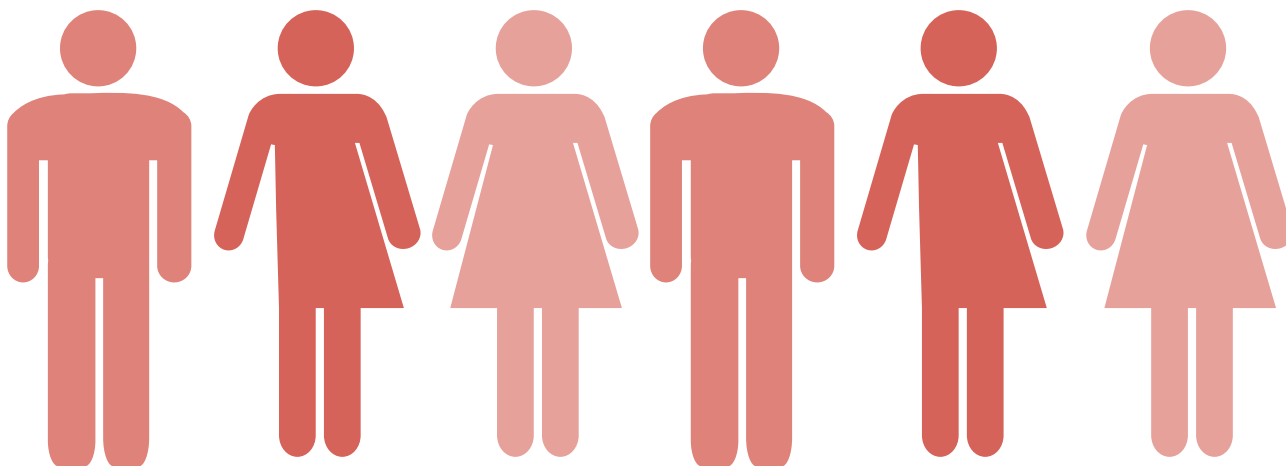
32% in colleges with support groups



17% in colleges without support groups



It is evident that **LGBTQ+** members are less satisfied with their personal and professional lives and are less likely to be happy in their day-to-day lives. However, our findings also show that support groups help in making the environment more conducive for **LGBTQ+** members.



Case Study 01



● ● IIMAlly, Indian Institution of Management Ahmedabad

- ● In 2015, a group of students took the initiative to start an informal support group to initiate dialogue on LGBTQ+ issues. They spoke to various students around the campus and formed a team of 5-6 members. They were able to on-board student leaders and faculty members who were equally passionate about the cause. An e-mail introducing the group and signed by 50–60 supporters was prepared and broadcasted the entire campus.

Over the course of the next few years the support group began to flourish, regularly conducting events, panel discussions and screening movies followed by theme discussions. In 2017, the support group received official recognition and was christened 'IIMAlly'.

IIMAlly's defined objectives were to increase awareness about LGBTQ+ issues on campus; to create an inclusive and accepting space for every student to thrive and prosper; and to make the campus a safe haven where students could unabashedly initiate discussions around gender identity and be open about expressing their gender.

IIMAlly has a formal structure to recruit members. Participation of members is voluntary. Those who volunteer are given specific tasks such as social media marketing, content writing, creative design, coordination, accounts and event management. The coordinators assume office after a formal election process. The group holds regular meetings, discussions and gatherings to sustain engagement.

The activities of IIMAlly are aligned with its objectives and include discussions, street plays and screening of movies. These activities are open to all. They have collaborated with organisations like the Humsafar Trust, American Corner and Kashish Arts Foundation to hold events on campus.

Students are educated about using gender-neutral language within the classroom and on social media platforms. The group provides access to an LGBTQ+ friendly mental health professional, who is easily reachable, for consultation by anyone on campus.

While the proponents appear to be supportive in public places, it is still a long journey before complete acceptance can thrive, especially in private spaces.

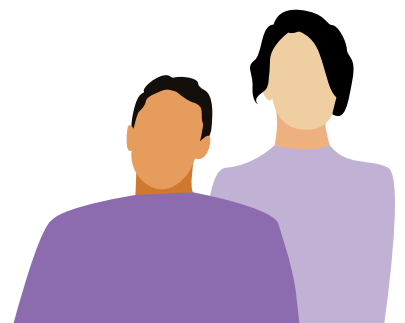


03



03

Current LGBTQ+ Support Infrastructure



03

Current LGBTQ+ Support Infrastructure

- • Support infrastructure includes policies, services and amenities that are essential for a decent quality of life on campus. It is necessary to understand the current support infrastructure offered by colleges in order to facilitate change.

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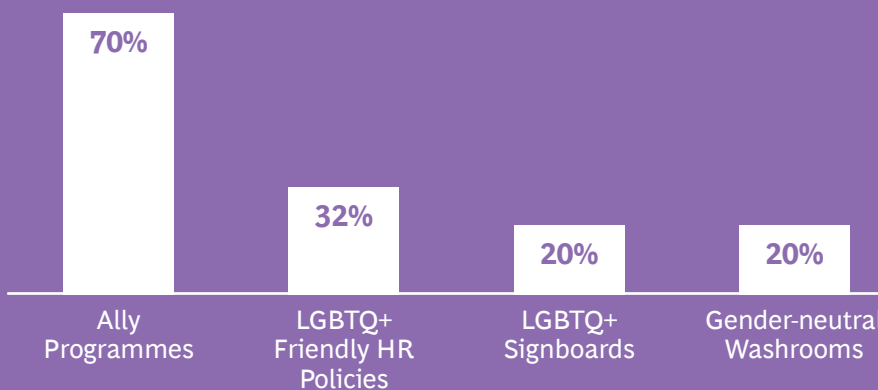


Most colleges in India do not have dedicated LGBTQ+ support systems.

When asked if their colleges had any kind of LGBTQ+ friendly infrastructure, policies, or programs, only **48%** of LGBTQ+ respondents from colleges that had an LGBTQ+ support group agreed. This problem is even more grave in colleges without support groups, wherein only **6%** of students agreed.

Exhibit 08:

Ally programmes most common in colleges with support groups; wide gap in policy support and physical infrastructure



In colleges that have support groups, over **45%** of LGBTQ+ students stated that they would be comfortable approaching the college counsellor if they found any challenges related to their sexual orientation or gender identity. The general perception was that the counsellor would likely be LGBTQ+ friendly. Further, **31%** of respondents from the community stated that their college administration or their professors communicated that they are against discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

But in colleges without support groups, only **20%** of community members felt that they would be comfortable in approaching the counsellor. A mere **8.6%** informed that their professors had communicated their disapproval of discrimination on the grounds of sexual identity or gender orientation.



The presence of support groups expresses the fact that the administration and professors support LGBTQ+ inclusion. It makes them more conscious of their duty towards the community. Acceptance at the personal level is good, but not enough. The administration and instructors must communicate their acceptance to the students. A support group becomes a tool to communicate to the students, professors and administration that the college supports LGBTQ+ inclusion.

Expectations of the LGBTQ+ Community



Members of the community ought to be treated at par and given equal respect, just like the non-community members. However, the aforementioned sections reveal various conscious and unconscious biases against the community. Our study showed that LGBTQ+ members believe that both structural and cultural changes are needed to create an inclusive college environment.

Dedicated and non-discriminatory policies and counselling facilities do provide the support infrastructure for the community; however, they may not be adequate. The support group can take the lead in organising various activities to create awareness about the LGBTQ+ community and eliminate subconscious bias. But the students and faculty also need to be proactive in driving the inclusive culture.

90%

of community members felt that the presence of a support group, either initiated by the administration or by the students, helps in fostering an inclusive mindset within the college.

85%

of community members felt that if students refrained from jokes against their LGBTQ+ peers and were vocal about their displeasure about such jokes, it would significantly help in building a positive environment.

65%

of community members felt that it is necessary for professors to communicate about LGBTQ+ diversity and inclusion to make the college more inclusive.



Why Should Colleges Make Efforts to Foster an LGBTQ+ Inclusive Atmosphere?



Fundamentally, colleges have a responsibility towards their students, to provide them with an environment where they feel safe and comfortable. This is not the case for many LGBTQ+ students at present, as our study shows. At the same time, it has been observed that across various dimensions of acceptance, an LGBTQ+ supportive infrastructure has a direct impact on individuals, reduces discrimination and encourages openness. Subsequently, it reduces the negativity felt by community members and enhances their college experience.

Most progressive institutions are taking affirmative steps to offer disadvantaged groups a chance to catch up with their more fortunate peers. First generation learners, economically and socially backward groups and girl children are being encouraged to pursue higher studies through various means of motivation. It is now time to extend these affirmative policies to sexual minority groups as well. These students are no different from others in their potential to contribute to the well-being of society.

Along with the students, the college also benefits from inclusive policies. The latter help create a better image, attracting students who value a socially responsible education system. A higher quality of students increases the standing of the college and takes it higher on the ratings ladder. But above all, an inclusive environment in college will create a better, more caring academic ambience for all, mainstream as well as minority and under-represented groups.

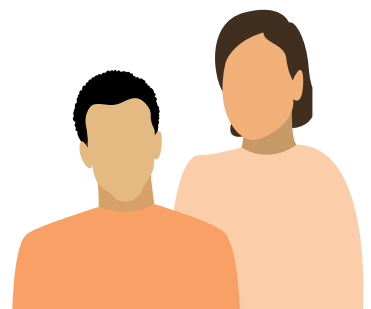




04

04

A Six-step Journey to Inclusivity



04

A Six-step Journey to Inclusivity

- ● A diversity and inclusion (D&I) student interest group offers LGBTQ+ students greater representation and improved quality of life in their institution. But the interests involved are complex; and therefore, the establishment of such a group will have to be part of a carefully considered campaign. Such groups are no longer a marketing novelty. Inclusivity and sensitivity towards students with different backgrounds, orientations and identities are factors around which colleges and universities will rapidly have to develop competencies. This is a key gateway to better student admissions, rankings and recruitments in the future.

Accordingly, a six-step framework has been prepared to deploy a D&I student interest group in higher education institutions. Such a group must address the ultimate outcomes that LGBTQ+ students desire and address the challenges that ensue for stakeholders at every level.



Exhibit 09: The Inclusivity Journey

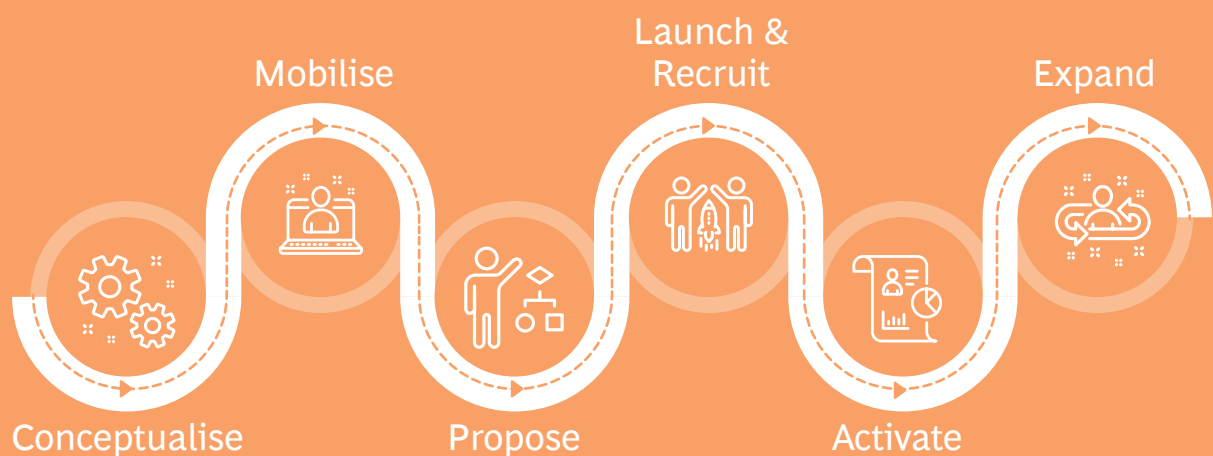











Exhibit 10: Campus Inclusivity | Launching a Student Interest Group

Stakeholders based on different levels of engagement

Steps	Description	Student Body	Faculty	Admin.
 1 Conceptualise	Conduct targeted need assessments, identify gaps and limitations and consequently develop vision and objective	●	●	●
 2 Mobilise	Create a network among key stakeholders (students, faculty, admin, external organisations, alumni, experts)	●	●	●
 3 Propose	Draft and present a proposal to the college authorities incorporating value proposition, infrastructure & budgetary requirements, activities	●	●	●
 4 Launch & Recruit	Launch the interest group officially, finalise org. structure and set up a structured recruitment process	●	●	●
 5 Activate	Plan and execute activities for the year, in tandem with short and long-term objectives	●	●	●
 6 Expand	Ensure sustainability of the interest group through external collaborations, robust leadership and continuous dialogue	●	●	●
 Leader  Contributor  Supporter				

Level of stakeholder engagement

High

Low

Source: BCG analysis, primary interviews



Step I: Conceptualise

The founders of the D&I student interest group must develop a meaningful vision and mission, keeping in mind the challenges and needs of LGBTQ+ students and the current limitations of their academic and administrative policies.

The specific challenges faced by the students may vary from institution to institution; hence an initial needs assessment must be conducted. Institutions must approach those who have led and/or founded similar groups in the past to be able to foresee the challenges and put in place mitigation strategies.



Step II: Mobilise

The second step involves creating a network among the various key stakeholder groups such as students, faculty, administrative departments, external organisations, experts and alumni to facilitate collaboration and seamlessly integrate the student interest group into the institutional framework. These stakeholders should be at the heart of the D&I effort. This will help enable engagement, generate support and foster a sense of community among the various groups.

- A core group of students sharing similar interests can be identified by initiating dialogue and conducting primary interviews and surveys. They can become part of an informal support group
- Contact should be established with heads of similar interest groups from other institutions and with alumni to identify possible challenges, mitigation measures and best practices
- Professors who align with similar topics and causes should be taken on board as faculty representatives and advisors
- Members of the administration should be sensitised about the importance and usefulness of such a support group
- External organisations such as city-level LGBTQ+ organisations, NGOs and other foundations should be involved to get further insight into the challenges faced by the community and plan activities and events in advance



Step III: Propose

Prepare an initial proposal based on the research, planning and networking undertaken. The proposal should highlight the need for and steps involved in setting up a D&I student interest group on campus. It should be presented to key stakeholders such as the administration, faculty and student union.

The proposal should include the following:

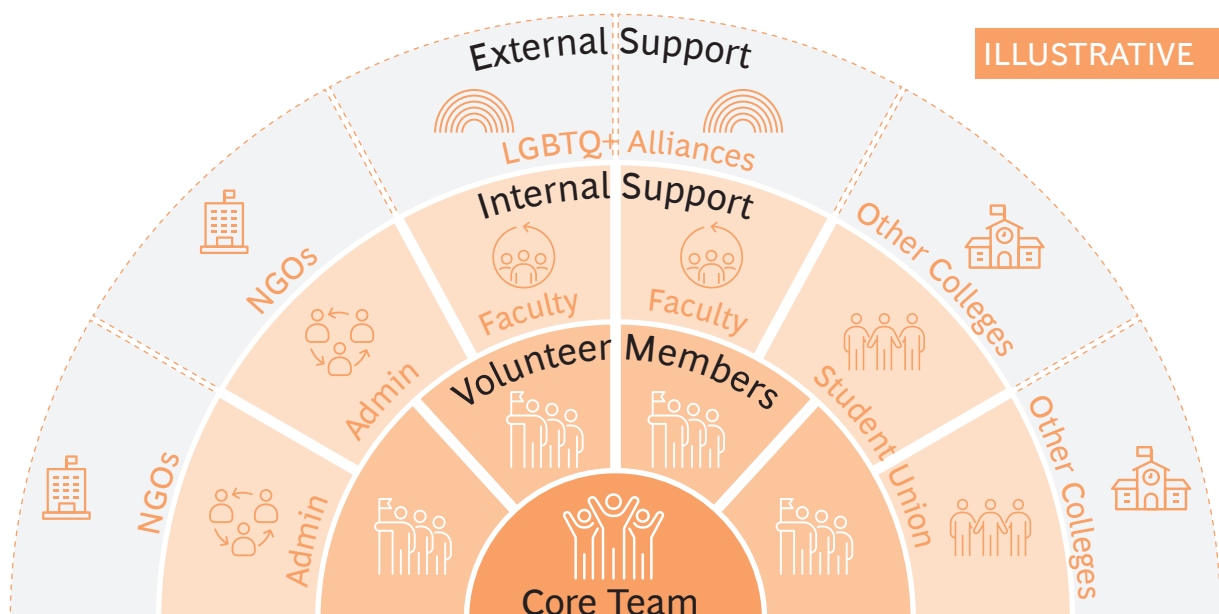
- The vision, mission and objectives of the student interest group along with the causes that it stands for
- A value proposition can detail how the student interest group will enhance the institution's brand image, improve the experience of students on campus and increase their chances of being hired by diversity-inclusive firms among other benefits
- An activity plan for the entire year, consistent with the major objectives of the institution
- Infrastructural and budgetary requirements, including all the resources needed to execute the planned activities and sustain the group
- The proposed organisational structure and office bearers for the first year

The initiators of the group must identify and understand the different layers of administration whom they can reach out to. This will include the dean, director, student council, faculty representatives, etc. Each of them must be approached with the proposal.

Once the proposal has been submitted to the key enablers in the institution, the head of the institution should be requested to convene a meeting of all enablers where a presentation can be made to the entire group and queries answered.

Step IV: Launch and Recruit

Exhibit 11: Structure of a support group



Officially launch the D&I student interest group through on-campus promotions and social media engagement and begin recruitment of members into the group.

The following best practices may be observed during the recruitment stage:

- Finalise the organisational structure before recruitment
 - An indicative organisational structure (this may vary from institution to institution) could include a core team comprising 4-5 student leaders heading the various verticals. Alongside this core team could be a wider team of volunteers/members. The group can be supported by a faculty advisor, student council and the institute administration
- Clearly highlight the mission and values of the institution and define the expectations of the group in terms of commitment of members
- Care must be taken to maintain anonymity of members who are part of the LGBTQ+ community, but do not want to be 'out' to all stakeholders



Step V: Activate

At this juncture, strategies should be designed, implemented and executed. The strategies should be consistent with the central objectives and goals of the group. Two main types of activation will have to be carried out: (A) Institution-centric interventions and (B) Affiliation and development of members and allies.

Exhibit 12: Activating the student interest group

Institution-centric Interventions



Sensitisation
and Awareness



Structural
Changes

Affiliation & Development of Members & Allies



Training and
Mentorship



Education /
Self-sensitisation

A. Institution-centric Interventions



Sensitisation and Awareness

Sensitisation is creating an atmosphere of acceptance and empathy towards those who are different. Sensitivity towards one's peers is always desirable in the student community and can raise the level of the campus experience. It seeks to create an ambience of confidence, where all newcomers are made to feel at home in a short time. A climate of sensitivity can be created with a little effort from the initiators of the D&I student interest group to keep everyone on campus informed about LGBTQ+ issues.

One way is to invite speakers from external organisations to conduct sessions or seminars. If members of the LGBTQ+ community are invited, they may help in empowering deeply closeted students. Screening of movies and documentaries can be used as a tool to sensitise the entire student community towards gender issues. Awareness campaigns such as LGBTQ+ Day or Pride Week can be organised.

Such individual events serve to increase awareness and generate conversation around gender related concerns.

Cross-club collaborations can ensure efficient mobilisation of resources and increase reach. The Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore's Theatre Club organised a street play competition on 'How do you react if a friend 'comes out' to you?' The Literature Group of Indian School of Business read and discussed excerpts from 'The Stonewall Reader'.

Social media campaigns can drive online engagement. Structured social media campaigns can be planned – this can include setting up a brand/logo of the organisation, encouraging members to use their pronouns on online platforms, and getting people to share (while maintaining privacy) their personal experiences and stories relevant to the online campaigns.

Structural Changes

Structural changes involve proactive policy interventions by the administration to ensure that the campus is seen as gender agnostic. Campus policies must be gender neutral and LGBTQ+ friendly. The changes described below are simple and easy to implement in a short time.

The campus should have an Equal Opportunity Policy, Anti-Discrimination Policy and a gender-neutral Prevention of Sexual Harassment (POSH) Policy. In keeping with these policies, all admission forms and other documents must be designed with space for all kinds of gender identities. All students should be given the freedom to use an identified name, pronoun and gender marker in official communication and records. Additionally, all members on campus should have the freedom to choose a dress code that reflects individual gender identity and expression.

It is imperative to address the needs of the transgender community as well. Gender-neutral washrooms and dorms should have a place on campus. The institution must provide accommodation and documentation change support to transitioning students, including, usage of identified name, pronoun and gender affirmation in university communication and records such as university websites, learning management systems, emails, databases, mailing lists, and so on.

Further, with most LGBTQ+ students not comfortable accessing the college counsellor it becomes critical for institutions to ensure 24X7 aid from mental health experts sensitive to LGBTQ+ issues, amongst other initiatives.



80% of LGBTQ+ students don't feel comfortable approaching the counsellor in colleges without support groups.



B. Affiliation and Development of Members and Allies



Training and Mentorship

Training programmes on LGBTQ+ themes and topics should be conducted for all students and professors on campus. Such programmes should be conducted along with the orientation and a refresher should be conducted annually. Mentorship programmes, specifically for community members, may be set up with professors or external experts who are sensitive to these issues. Such programmes serve to ensure personal and professional growth of community members.

Education/Self-sensitisation

Members and allies must be trained in using the right pronouns and avoiding words and actions that could be considered homophobic or transphobic. They should be taught how to address these issues when they come across them. Information can be disseminated through online and offline communication channels such as flyers, booklets and newsletters. The communication must highlight the internal/external events planned and the social media campaigns being conducted.

Members and allies must also be trained on mental health first aid to be able to handle a mental breakdown; they must be aware about how to conduct themselves when someone 'comes out' to them. Ice-breaking sessions, informal get-togethers, coffee table chats and group activities are ways of building a sense of community.

Wider information of a general nature can be made available by including LGBTQ+ themes in courses/electives. For example, in Jadavpur University, a student can opt for a course titled 'Queer Studies', offered by the Department of English as part of the full-time postgraduate course. Jadavpur University is one of the first Indian universities to have a dedicated course containing the word 'queer' in its title.



Step VI: Expand

Once the D&I student interest group is set up, it must expand its initiatives to reach a wider spectrum of people and evolve with the changing times and needs of the community. This is important for the group to be sustainable.

I. Partnerships



The interest group can collaborate with external organisations such as queer collectives, NGOs and corporates to expand its impact. Indian School of Business organised a ‘Joy of Giving Day’ in partnership with NGOs working for transpersons; they organised a fundraiser and created a platform for students to work directly with transpersons and understand their journey.

Indian Institute of Technology, Gandhinagar collaborated with external organisations in Ahmedabad to organise the city’s first ever Pride Parade. In Jadavpur University, a section of the student community provided free meals to transpersons who happened to be among many other underprivileged people residing in the vicinity of the university at the onset of the COVID-19 lockdown.

Another way of expanding outreach is through participation in global events. Majority of these sessions will be conducted online in the post-pandemic world, so participation will be relatively easy. Indian School of Business participated in London Business School’s LGBTQ+ annual seminar, EUROUT 2020, conducted online. Punjab University collaborated with The University of Sydney to conduct a 15-day workshop covering topics relevant to the LGBTQ+ movement and issues around it.

Synergies can be generated through the creation of a network of similar interest groups from other institutions. Shared learnings, collective initiatives and advisory services to upcoming student interest groups can form the core focus of such networks. For example, Pravritti is an informal umbrella organisation for all IITs, comprising a cross-institutional network of students, faculty and alumni.

II. Regular Pulse Checks



Vision and goals have to be dynamic in nature; they must evolve over time. The D&I student interest group must establish a system for continuous progress and change. Surveys and discussions within and outside the group must be carried out regularly. A methodology to measure progress in terms of outreach, growth and changes implemented must be put in place. Once this is done, specific action points and targets can be set. But the latter should be flexible, with the scope to be revised to remain aligned with the changing needs of the community. Potential challenges can be pre-empted through timely mitigation measures.

Battling the Headwinds

● ● Opposition from Certain Stakeholders



- ● A campus is a place where divergent views come together to be discussed and debated.
- ● Diversity of opinion must be encouraged, but it must be steered to be constructive; it must raise the level of thought and behaviour on and off campus. The D&I student interest group may receive criticism from some stakeholders due to their lack of knowledge, low acceptance level and resistance to change. This is expected whenever something new and out of the mainstream is introduced. It should not be seen as an impediment. Any challenges faced by students that lead to a diminished positive experience must be escalated by the group to higher authorities including the faculty, administration or the board.

Break in Momentum



Lack of motivation can be a serious impediment to the overall progress of the D&I student interest group. This may happen when there is a change in leadership or when the current leaders change focus as they progress academically. This is not unique to the D&I student interest group. It happens across all groups and is a feature of campus life where students spend a limited number of years. Interventions across recruitment, development and communication with existing and new members can be useful in mitigating this issue.

Lack of a Supportive Environment



The environment in largely all campuses in India remains unsupportive to the LGBTQ+ community. This leads to continued prevalence of deeply closeted LGBTQ+ members, which, as highlighted in the report, hampers their overall well-being. This, clubbed with a lack of ally presence, can lead to lack of initiative for starting and running the support group.

Absence of Policies and Support Specific to the Transgender Community



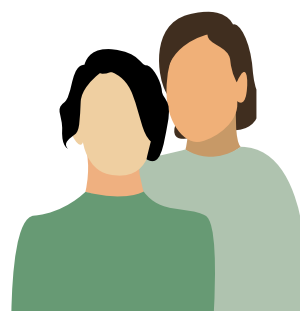
Despite growing awareness about the LGBTQ+ community, many campuses are ill-equipped to put in place policies and cultures of inclusivity and support towards trans-students. Lack of gender-neutral infrastructure (washrooms, dormitories, etc.) and non-existent gender affirmation support policies can force trans-students to drop out or change their career paths.



05

05

Conclusion



05 Conclusion

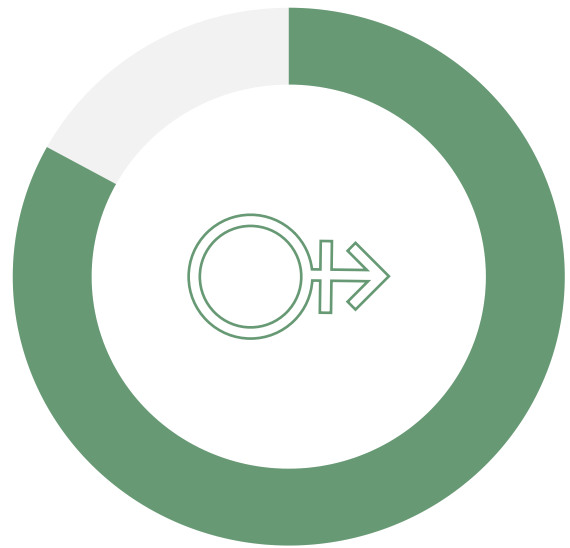
- ● College life plays a critical role in an individual's overall development. As per our research, we found that 83% of LGBTQ+ students on Indian campuses have little or no support. This leads to dissatisfaction with their personal and professional lives.
- ● Society's well-being lies in the well-being of all segments of the population. When any one segment feels left out, that results in simmering discontent.

Colleges are expected to provide support and security, and it is a serious concern when the same is not found by members of the LGBTQ+ community. There is an urgent need for colleges to prioritise and solve this problem.

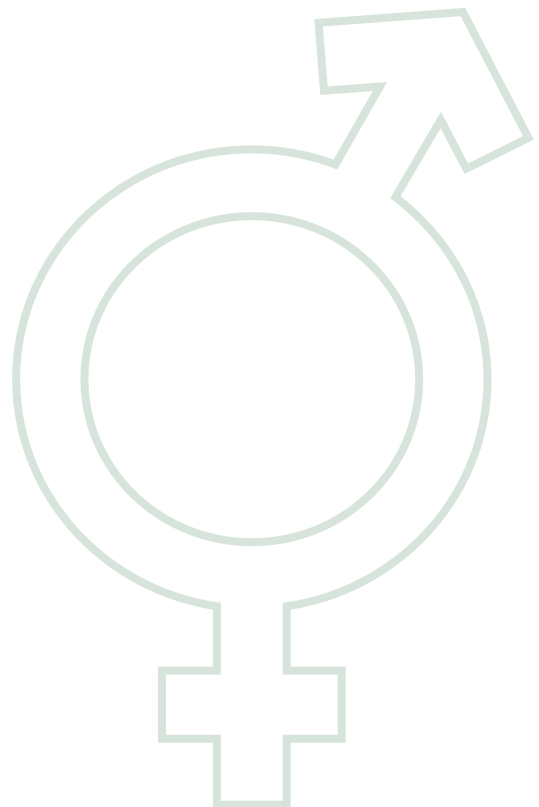
The experience of LGBTQ+ students significantly improves with the setting up of LGBTQ+ support groups.

With support from key stakeholders on campus, namely peers, faculty and administrators, these groups can go a long way in providing a secure environment to members to live their lives and pursue their dreams without fear, and at the same time unlock value for campuses.

The experience of several campuses across India has shown that these support groups can bring multiple stakeholders together and flourish despite certain challenges.



83% of LGBTQ+ students on Indian campuses have little or no support



The Way Forward

Each stakeholder group can play its role in making the campus all-inclusive and LGBTQ+ friendly.



Students _____○

Students will play a major role in giving legitimacy to a D&I student interest group. They comprise the largest section of members, and have the power to influence others. Any student can take the initiative to set up and join a D&I student interest group on campus, either as a member or as an ally. The group will help sensitise peers and create a positive environment for the members of the LGBTQ+ community.



Administration _____○

The administration must be willing to permit the establishment of a D&I student interest group. The institution should set aside a budget for the group, provide financial support when needed and appoint one or more persons to oversee the running of the group. Members of the administration must be proactive about breaking stereotypes and treat this group as any other cultural group on campus. Gender-neutral policies, programs and amenities should be installed on campus.



Faculty _____○

Faculty members can bring an element of dignity to a D&I student interest group. Teachers can rally their students and give confidence to the shy ones about associating with the group. For example, Queer Studies can be introduced as part of course work and research. They can impress the administration about the importance of such studies. Colleagues from other institutions may be invited to conduct seminars and workshops or even serve as visiting faculty.

A D&I student interest group on campus will raise the bar of inclusivity in higher education. It will propel the administration, faculty members and students to work in tandem to embrace the values of equality for all.

Case Study 02



• • Orenda: Gender and Sexuality Club, Indian Institute of Technology - Gandhinagar

- • Orenda was initiated in 2015. However, it could not take off due to a backlash arising out of lack of sensitisation of students. But eventually the founders were able to formalise the club. More members began to join, and the strength grew from 4 to 27
- • members during the academic year 2018-19. The members began collaborating with other interest groups and as a result were able to reach out to a wide population of students on campus.

Orenda's raison d'être is to be able to create and provide a safe space on campus for people of alternate sexuality. Here they can conduct dialogues that are still considered taboo in mainstream society. Orenda is a beacon of support for LGBTQ+ students, enabling them to experience positive change during their stay on campus.

Membership is open to anyone on campus. A majority of the members are allies. Recruitment takes place through an interview process. The Orenda team has established a good way of maintaining continuity: the current secretary receives help from previous secretaries. In this manner, the network remains active because the current secretary will have to liaise with the next secretary when the time comes.

The activities carried out by the club have included a 'Gender Sensitisation Conclave'; a nationwide quiz competition on the laws related to women; 'Jalwa', an annual fashion show on the theme 'Breaking Gender Stereotypes'; a guest lecture on 'Prejudices and Stigma Attached to Homosexuality in India' by Prince Manvendra Singh Gohil; a street play on 'Life of a Transgender Person'; a mental health workshop; a sex education workshop for freshers; and film screenings and cultural performances. When the Supreme Court read down Article 377 and decriminalised homosexuality on 6 September 2018, Orenda organised a Mini Pride Parade followed by a small celebration.

But like all such clubs, Orenda too has its own challenges. It faces criticism from some sections of students. As a result, there is overall reluctance to be seen to be participating actively or even attending its events. These challenges, unless addressed seamlessly, are likely to result in differences of opinion among the leaders, and may break the momentum whenever there is a change in leadership. One of the ways in which the club has responded to these challenges is by on-boarding the founders, who are now alumni, on the executive board. This ensures continuity of leadership and objectives.

Note to the Reader

- • This report has been co-authored by Boston Consulting Group (BCG), Pride Circle Foundation, and Indian Institute of Management – Ahmedabad.



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We extend our appreciation to **Jasmine Pithawala**, **Micky Chittora** and **Bhumika Gupta** for marketing and communications support; to **Kanika Sanghi** and **Sidharth Kapil** from BCG's Centre for Consumer Insights for their support in conducting the research; to **Anjanee Rao** for her editorial support; and to **Jamshed Daruwalla**, **Saroj Singh**, **Pradeep Hire** and **Vivek Thakur** for their contributions to design and production.

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