

MAY 30, 2024

Understanding and Serving LGBTQ+ Refugee and Newcomer Clients

switchboard
connecting resettlement experts





Today's Facilitator



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LSW**

Switchboard Training
Officer, Client-Centered
Services

Learning Objectives



By the end of this session, you will be able to:

1

Define

LGBTQ+, sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression within diverse newcomer cultures and contexts

2

Summarize

some of the unique challenges and nuances LGBTQ+ refugees and newcomers experience in their resettlement to the U.S.

3

Identify

important considerations and skills in serving and advocating for LGBTQ+ newcomer clients

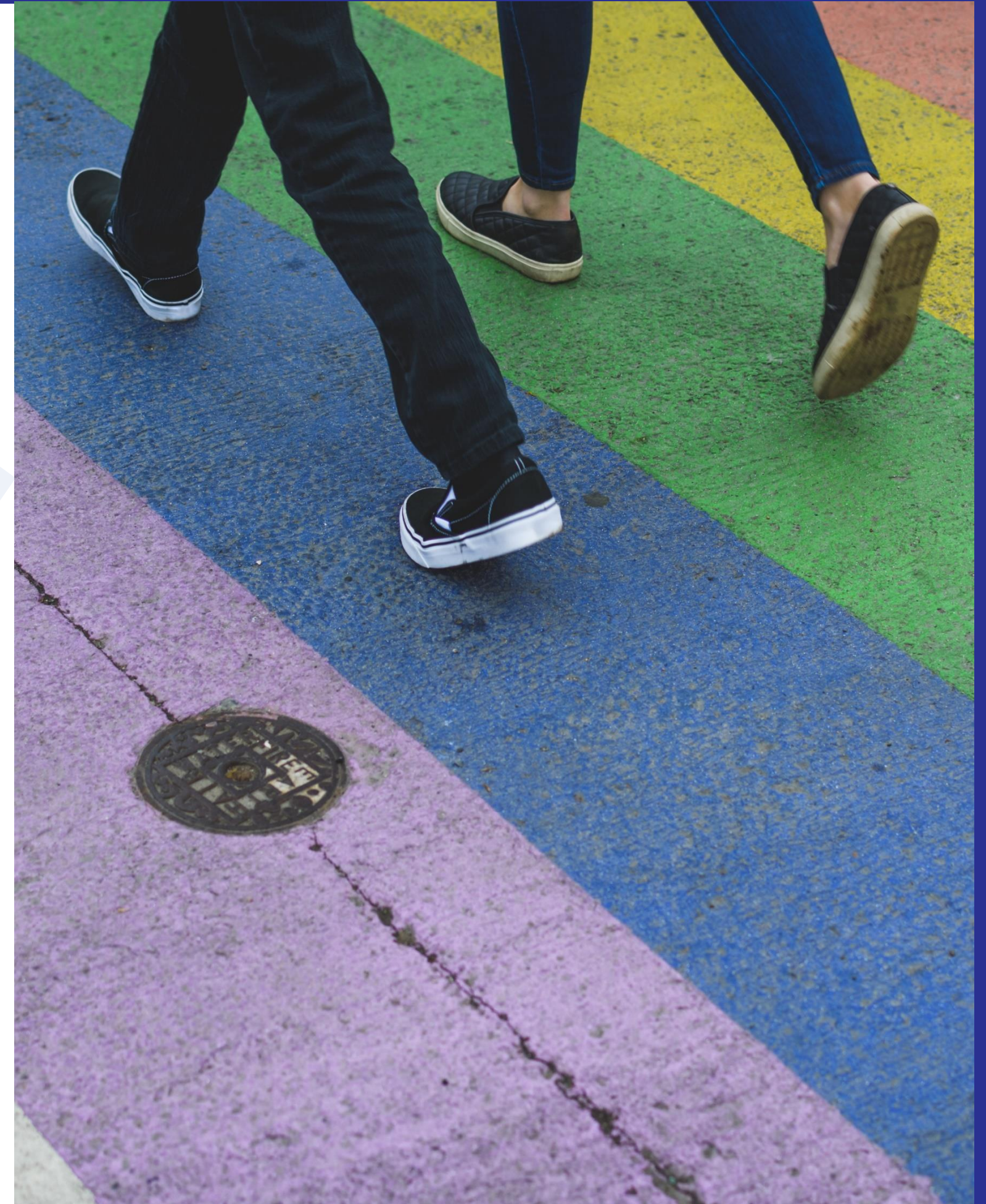


1

Defining LGBTQ+ and Key Terms

Ground Rules

- Remember why we are in resettlement: to serve all refugees equitably and respectfully
- Stay curious and open; learn and connect with others
- Maintain professionalism regarding cultural/religious backgrounds
- Be kind to yourself as you learn and improve service; extend kindness to staff with varying experience levels



The background of the image shows three rolling suitcases with a rainbow-colored vertical stripe pattern (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple) lined up in a hallway. The suitcases are positioned on the left side of the frame, receding into the distance. The hallway has large windows in the background, and the floor is a light-colored tile. A dark blue semi-transparent box is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing white text.

Every LGBTQ+ story is unique.

Every LGBTQ+ newcomer's experience is different and shaped by many stories and their own personhood.

Always go deeper to get to know the person and their experience.



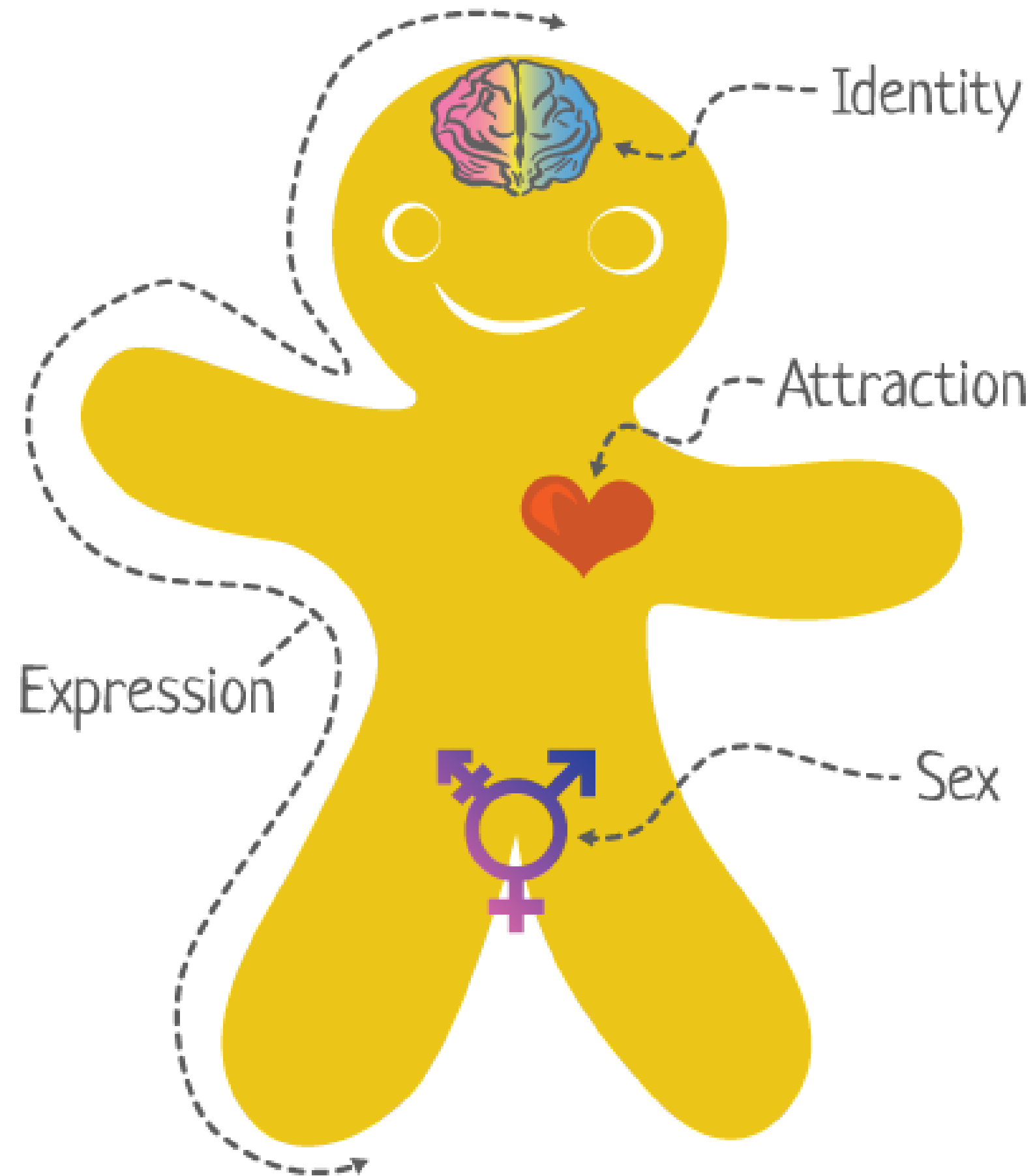
Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity/Expression (SOGIE)

- **Sexual Orientation:** Emotional and sexual attraction to and relations with different or same genders
- **Gender Identity:** Deeply felt internal experience of gender, which may or may not match sex assigned at birth
- **Gender expression:** Outward manifestation of gender identity, often seen on a masculine–feminine spectrum



The “Genderbread” Person: A Visualization of SOGIE

Each element has a spectrum of many options (e.g., identifying as woman, man, non-binary, or many other categories)



Source: Sam Killerman (2016)



Gender Pronouns

- **What is a gender pronoun?** Gender pronouns are words that refer to people in speech or writing.
 - Examples
 - She/her (feminine)
 - He/him (masculine)
 - They/them (gender-neutral)
- **Why are they important?** Correctly using someone's gender pronouns shows basic respect for who they are and their gender identity.
- **How can I know or find out what they are?** If not already listed on your agency's intake forms, you can offer your own pronouns to demonstrate safety and lead by example.

Adapted from [NYC Department of Social Services](#)



L

G

B

T

Q

+

- **What does it stand for?**
 - Lesbian
 - Gay
 - Bisexual
 - Transgender
 - Questioning or Queer
 - + (Umbrella)
- **Why use this term?**

Lesbian

G

B

T

Q

+

- **Lesbian:** A woman whose enduring romantic, emotional, and/or physical attraction is to other women



Adapted from [UNHCR LGBTQI+ Integration Handbook](#)



L

Gay

B

T

Q

+

- **Gay:** An adjective traditionally used to describe men whose enduring romantic, emotional, and/or physical attraction is to other men. Also used in other contexts or as a self-identifier across the community.

Adapted from [UNHCR LGBTQI+ Integration Handbook](#)



L

G

Bisexual

T

Q

+

- **Bisexual:** An adjective that describes people who have the capacity for romantic, emotional, and/or physical attraction to people of the same gender as their own, as well as to people of a different gender from their own.

Adapted from [UNHCR LGBTQI+ Integration Handbook](#)



L

G

B

Transgender

Q

+

- **Trans, Transgender:** Terms used by some people whose gender identity and, in some cases, gender expression, differs from what is typically associated with the sex they were assigned at birth. Trans is independent of sexual orientation.

Adapted from [UNHCR LGBTQI+ Integration Handbook](#)



L

G

B

T

Queer

+

- **Queer:** Historically a negative term, queer has been reclaimed by LGBTQ+ people to describe themselves. It is considered inclusive of a wide range of sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions.
- Some people consider the Q to mean “questioning”—on a journey exploring their own gender identity or sexual orientation.

Adapted from [UNHCR LGBTQI+ Integration Handbook](#)



L

G

B

T

Q

+

- The plus sign encompasses diverse LGBTQ+ experiences, including various sexual orientations, gender identities, expressions, and characteristics, along with other terms used for identification.

Adapted from [UNHCR LGBTQI+ Integration Handbook](#)



L

G

B

T

Q

+

■ Other Identity Terms

- **Ally:** Supports and advocates for a community they're not part of
- **Intersex:** Natural bodily variations in sex characteristics beyond the typical male-female binary
- **Non-Binary:** Gender identity outside the male-female binary

Adapted from [UNHCR LGBTQI+ Integration Handbook](#)

L

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Q

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■ Other terms

- **Coming out:** Self-acceptance process, acknowledging and sharing one's identity
- **Outing:** Intentionally disclosing someone's identity without consent
- **Transition:** The process in which transgender persons align their physical appearance with their gender identity

Adapted from [UNHCR LGBTQI+ Integration Handbook](#) and [Heartland Alliance's Rainbow Response Manual](#)

72 COUNTRIES
STILL WITH
ANTI-GAY LAWS

CALL
ME
KUCHU

Cultural Sensitivity & Terminology

- Even if newcomers identify as LGBTQ+, they may not be familiar or comfortable with all these terms, especially if their home country or community stigmatizes different LGBTQ+ identities

RAINBOW
REFUGEES
MUNCH

RAINBOW
REFUGEES
MUNCH

RAINBOW
REFUGEE
MUNCH



2

LGBTQ+ Cultural Contexts and Experiences in Resettlement

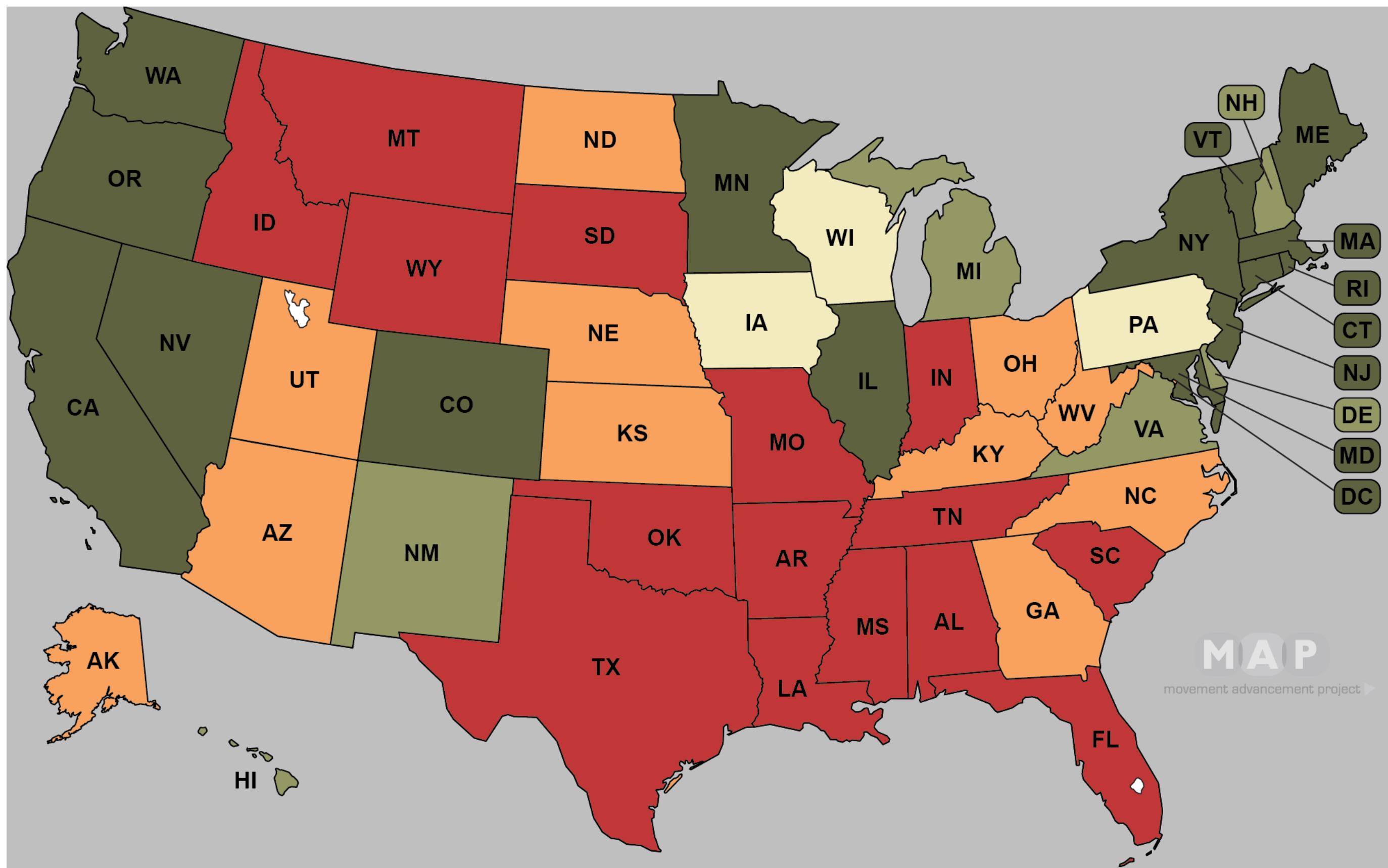
LGBTQ+ Clients' Identities

- Some asylum claims or determinations of refugee status are based on clients' experience of persecution for their SOGIE
- Other newcomers may come out after their arrival and resettlement
- Clients may come from countries with criminalization and/or severe social stigma of LGBTQ+ relationships or identities/expression





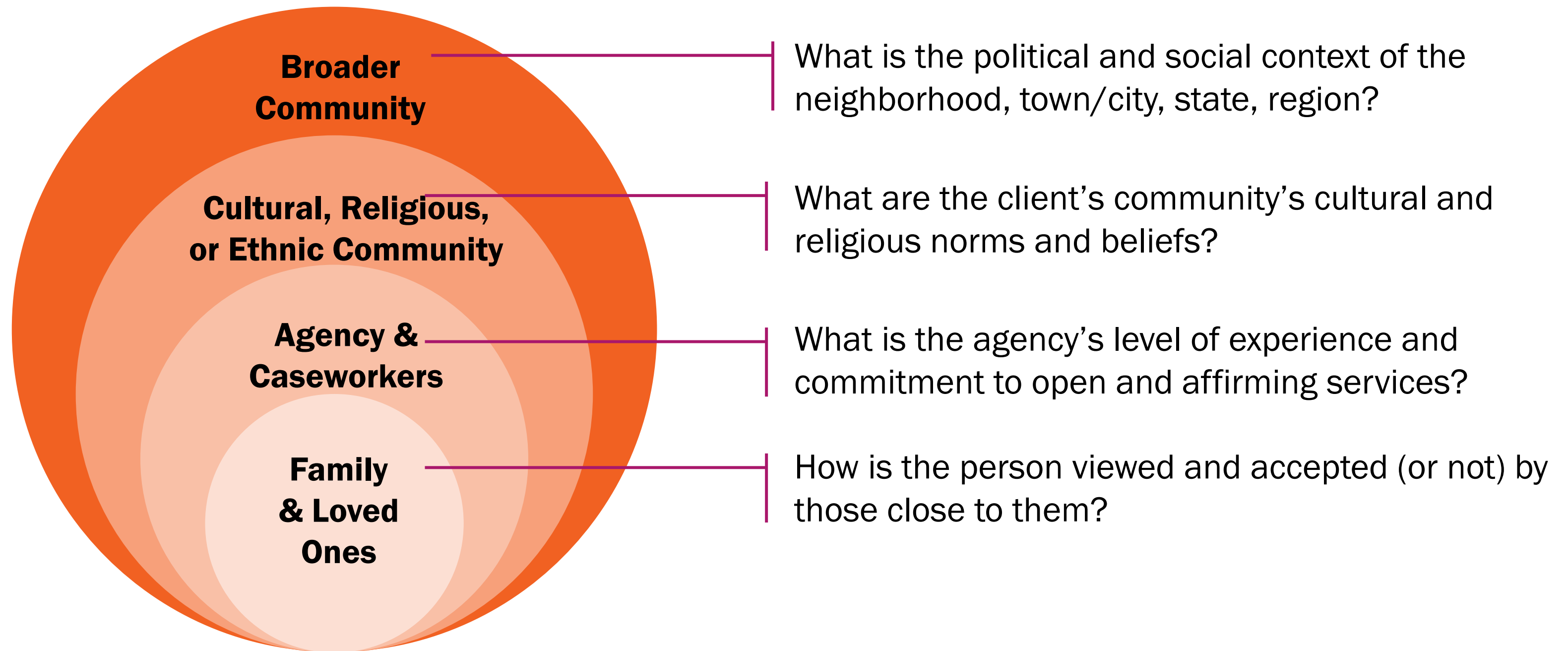
Overall Tally of Positive or Negative Laws & Policies toward LGBTQ+ by State



- High/positive
- Medium
- Fair
- Low protections
- Negative policies

Source: Movement Advancement Project (2024)

Impact of Community and Context



Impact of Community and Contexts



Where we have the most control and influence on supporting LGBTQ+ clients

Affected Resettlement Domains



Health

Specialized care,
confidentiality

Mental Health

Stigma and discrimination,
internalized homophobia

Employment and Education

Confidentiality, comfort at
work or in class



Housing

Safety, feeling comfortable at
home

Social Connection

Isolation, connection in
community

Immigration Status

Legal name and documents,
partnership and marriage

Case Scenario #1: John

John is a gay East African refugee. The government discovered his relationship with his boyfriend, Emmanuel. Emmanuel was imprisoned and tortured, dying in prison, and John fled to a nearby country and was resettled to the United States. You are now his caseworker, and he is known around your agency for his joyful personality. However, he has confided to you that he suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and is seeking intensive mental health therapy to address his low mood and anxieties.



Case Scenario #2: Zeina

Zeina is a political asylee from the Middle East. She was active in anti-government movements and fled the country after receiving death threats from government operatives. A few months into working with Zeina, she discloses to you that she is bisexual and has fallen in love with another woman in her English class. They would like to work toward moving in together but are afraid of telling others about their relationship or finding housing that would be welcoming to them.



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How are John's and Zeina's experiences different, and how might that affect the services they need?



3

Serving LGBTQ+ Clients

Best Practices and Lived Experience Panel



**What can we do as
service providers?**



Basic Best Practices



Always refer to the client in the way they prefer (name, pronouns, etc.)



Demonstrate allyship and that you can provide a safe space



Follow client's lead on sharing SOGIE information; keep it private if they wish (medical and legal exceptions)



Never assume you know the client's experience or desires based on their SOGIE or their cultural/religious background

Advocating For and With Clients

- Follow the client's lead and center their voice in service provision
- Maintain open communication with clients: How do they want your support?
- Protect clients' confidentiality within and outside of your agency (with other clients and service providers, with the community)
- Ensure safety at your agency, identifying safe and affirming spaces



What if I have conflicting ethical, cultural, or religious beliefs myself?



- Recall our ground rules:
 - Stay curious and open; be kind to yourself as you learn and improve service
 - Maintain commitment to serving all clients equitably and respectfully
 - Extend kindness to staff with varying experience levels
- Avoid referring out or refusing service based on personal beliefs
- Seek supervision to process your conflicts

“I am not an expert; I am not ready to serve LGBTQ+ clients.”



As an ethical and thoughtful case manager, you *are* ready to work with LGBTQ+ clients!

- Listen to clients; commit to lifelong learning
- Affirm your support to clients and be honest about your learning curve
- Find more expert/appropriate referrals when dealing with specialized gender-affirming care, legal questions, mental health referrals, etc.

Case Scenario: Rodrigo

You are working with Rodrigo, a Central American asylee who recently found your agency. Upon intake, you gather Rodrigo's documents and see that his green card lists him as Marta and as female. Your agency generally places single men in convenient dorm-style housing with a shared kitchen and living spaces. A month after placement, Rodrigo tells you he feels unsafe in his housing after hearing other men talking about gay men and "cross-dressers" with disgust. Rodrigo has not officially come out to you as trans.



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What is one step you could take to support and advocate for Rodrigo?

Lived Experience Panel



Kansime Shalom

They/them



Craig Mortley, MSc

He/him



Questions?

Type your question in the **Q&A**

Click **thumbs-up**  to vote for others' questions

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Help us help you!

Scan the QR code or click the link in the chat to access our feedback survey!

- Five questions
- 60 seconds
- Help us improve future training and technical assistance





Upcoming Programs

- **Webinar:** Creating Inclusive Spaces for the LGBTQ+ Community in Newcomer Services
Tuesday, June 25, 1:00 – 2:15 PM ET
- **Webinar:** LGBTQ+ Responsive Unaccompanied Refugee Minor (URM) Programs and Services, Tuesday, July 9
at 2:00 – 3:15 PM ET
- **Apply for our Certificate Course on Enhancing Services for LGBTQ+ Newcomer Clients and dive deeper!**
 - Weekly on Wednesdays, June 26 – July 17, 2:00 – 3:30 PM ET
 - [Application](#) due next Thursday, June 6!
Information will be sent out.





Recommended Resources

- Podcast: [Serving LGBTQ+ Newcomers](#) (2023)
- Evidence Summary: [What Works to Support LGBTQ+ Refugees?](#) (2022)
- Resource List: [Creating Safe Spaces for LGBTQ+ Clients](#) (2021)
- Heartland Alliance, Guide: [Rainbow Response: A Practical Guide to Resettling LGBT Refugees and Asylees](#) (2012)
- More resources and events to come!



Podcast





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