

# RESTORING CONFIDENCE IN PRIDE

## The Way Forward



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We would also like to acknowledge the work done by members of the St. John's Pride crisis management team led by Taylor Stocks. Special thanks to Nathalie Brunet for her leadership and facilitation of the community dialogue and subsequent Pride election meeting.

Without the generosity of our Indigenous brothers and sisters, this undertaking would not have been possible. We acknowledge that the land on which St. John's Pride operates is the ancestral homeland of the Beothuk and Mi'kmaq people.

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# ABOUT ST. JOHN'S PRIDE



St. John's Pride Inc. is a registered nonprofit organization that has a mandate to provide and facilitate educational, networking, and issue awareness. It does this through fostering leadership and diversity in the LGBTQI2S+ community, and delivering public events that celebrate and promote the visibility of LGBTQI2S+ people, their accomplishments, and Newfoundland heritage.

# BACKGROUND

St. John's Pride exists to serve the interests and needs of the LGBTQI2S+ community. A nine-member board of directors is elected with the promise to carry out this mandate in an effective and transparent manner. However, the inability of St. John's Pride to recruit and retain board members for the required service terms of one year (for directors at large) and two years (for internal, external, and finance co-chairs) has hampered the organization's ability to fulfill its obligations. In addition, members of the LGBTQI2S+ community have often complained that the board is out of touch with its membership. This has resulted in a crisis of confidence, and demands for greater accountability and stronger leadership.

St. John's Pride has perennially suffered from challenges in attracting and retaining volunteers to its board of directors, for tangled reasons. As a volunteer commitment, the workload is both intense and prolonged, and the needs and expectations of the community regarding the role of Pride are passionately held, diverse, and sometimes contradictory.

Many board members are young and inexperienced. The board lacks the group facilitation skills needed for coordinating a diverse and inexperienced team through a heavy set of tasks. As well, it lacks expertise in financial management. Conflicts arise within the board and with other community groups. Most directors resign before completion of their term, and all are disinclined to stand for re-election.

The resulting lack of continuity leads to a loss of collective knowledge from one year to the next, compounded by a lack—or even loss—of documentation of previous boards' work. Thus a vicious cycle prevents the St. John's Pride board from accumulating the knowledge base and skilled leadership needed to build a strong, effective organization. And yet, successive boards have muddled through in spite of the challenges, and every year Pride Week happens and even grows. This is a testament to the engagement of the LGBTQI2S+ community, and to the dedication of board members who stick it out, for whom we are deeply thankful.

In the last two years, controversy over the presence of police in uniform at Pride has acted as a flashpoint for conflict within the community. In February 2018 the board became completely nonoperational, following the resignation of all but one director, Derek Semerad. Mr. Semerad called upon Taylor Stocks and the authors of this report to form a small crisis management team to help steer the organization through a community consultation process and the election of a new board.

This report contains the results of the community consultation process.

## **HOW THE REPORT WAS RESEARCHED**

The LGBTQI2S+ community is central to the effective operations of St. John's Pride. For the organization to be responsive to the interests and needs of the membership, community members have an important role in defining the critical functions of the organization.

In March 2018, a concerted effort was made by the crisis management team to engage the LGBTQI2S+ community in representing its aspirations to the incoming board. To accomplish this, they used a community survey and a community dialogue. The resulting St. John's Pride community survey was administered via SurveyMonkey, between March 7 and 22. A total of 275 responses were collected. The two-hour St. John's Pride community dialogue took place on March 11, at the Benevolent Irish Society. It was well attended, with 45 people present. The content of the current report is based on these two data sources.

# RESULTS FROM ST. JOHN'S COMMUNITY SURVEY

Ten questions were asked in the community survey. Questions 1 and 2 were aimed at understanding the demographic profile of respondents, including age, gender, and ethnicity. Due to a lack of funding, no further categories could be researched in the survey. Thus, the reported data provides only a partial portrait of the diversity of the community. Question 3 sought to determine respondents' affiliation to St. John's Pride, while Questions 4 through 10 focused on the operations of St. John's Pride.

## AGE

The groups most heavily represented in the survey were those generally referred to as millennial (aged 18 to 34) and Gen X (aged 35 to 50). This may be due to the survey format and advertising, which was held exclusively on Facebook. Figure 1 shows the age distribution of respondents.

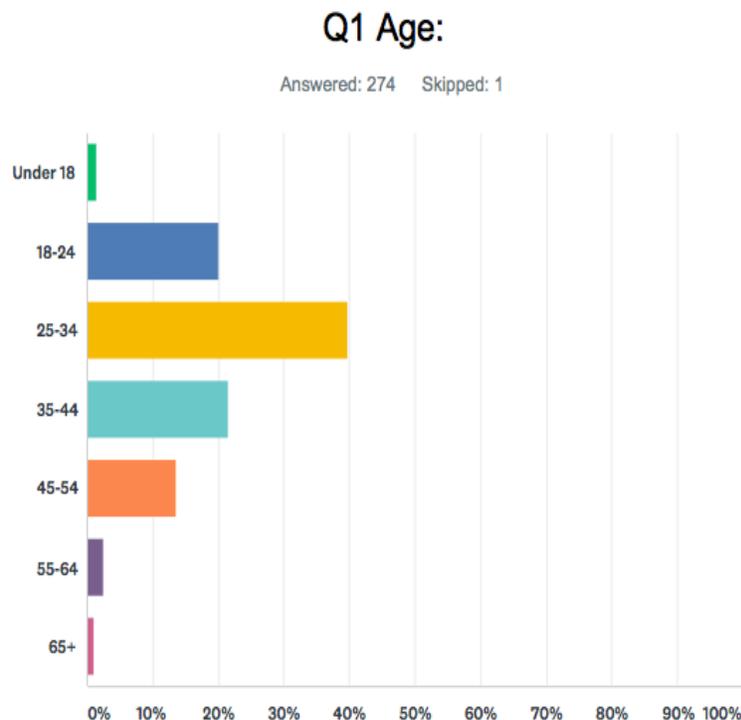


Figure 1. Q1: Age distribution of respondents.

## **GENDER AND ETHNICITY**

Two hundred sixty-seven respondents chose to identify their gender. Most (124) identified as ciswomen; 102 identified as cismen. A small number (41) classified as trans, nonbinary, genderqueer, queer, or genderfluid. While the latter group represents a comparatively smaller number, it reflects a significant level of engagement from a part of our community that often feels its needs are not adequately recognized by the larger Pride community. The team was encouraged by this level of participation.

Likewise, 271 respondents responded to the question about their racial and/or ethnic identity. The majority (205) indicated White/Caucasian as their racial and/or ethnic group. Nine people indicated Indigenous-and-White ancestry, while five identified as Indigenous. Six non-Indigenous and non-White racialized respondents were represented in the survey. These figures do not add up to the total response, since some respondents did not specify their racial and ethnic backgrounds. Nonetheless, the data does provide some indication of the racial and ethnic makeup of the LGBTQI2S+ community.

According to the most recent census, non-White and non-Indigenous racialized groups comprise 2.4 percent of the total population of Newfoundland Labrador, with the majority living in St. John's. With more immigrants arriving in St. John's, it is likely that the Pride board needs to do a better job of fostering a welcoming and inclusive environment for these people, to enhance their sense of belonging.

## **AFFILIATION WITH ST. JOHN'S PRIDE**

Respondents' affiliation with St. John's Pride was mixed, but some connections were more pronounced than others. Two hundred twenty-seven respondents stated that they "identify as a part of the LGBTQI2S+ community," which would imply that 48 people responding to the survey did not identify as a member of that community. The next top answer choice, "I have attended Pride event," was reported by 143 people. Eighty and 77 people stated that they "have attended a fundraising event" and "have participated in online discussions about St. John's Pride," respectively. Finally, 72 people reported being "a member of other LGBTQI2S+ organizations." See Figure 2.

### Q3 What is your affiliation with St. John's Pride? [select all that apply]

Answered: 275 Skipped: 0

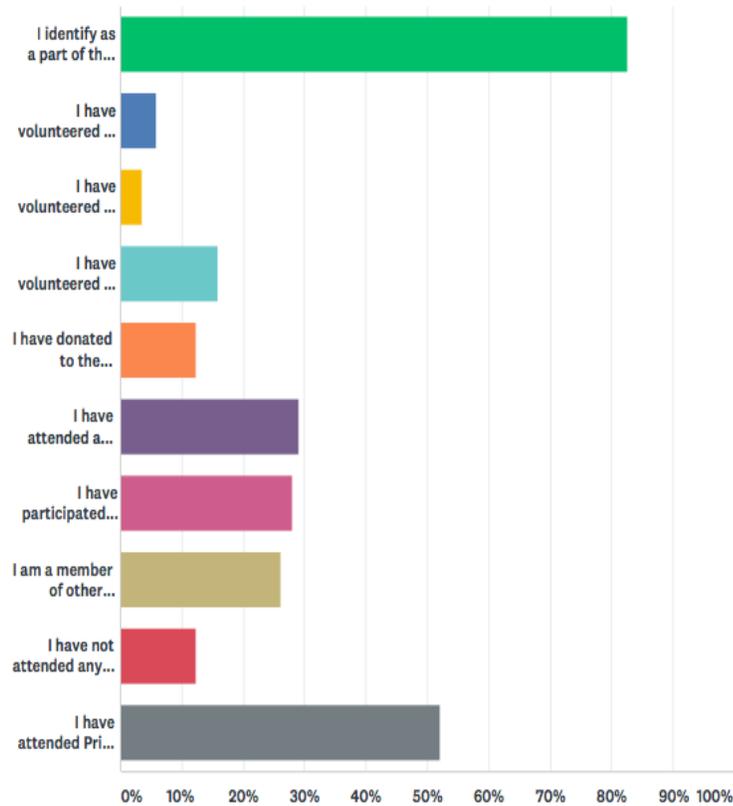


Figure 2. Q3: Affiliation with St. John's Pride.

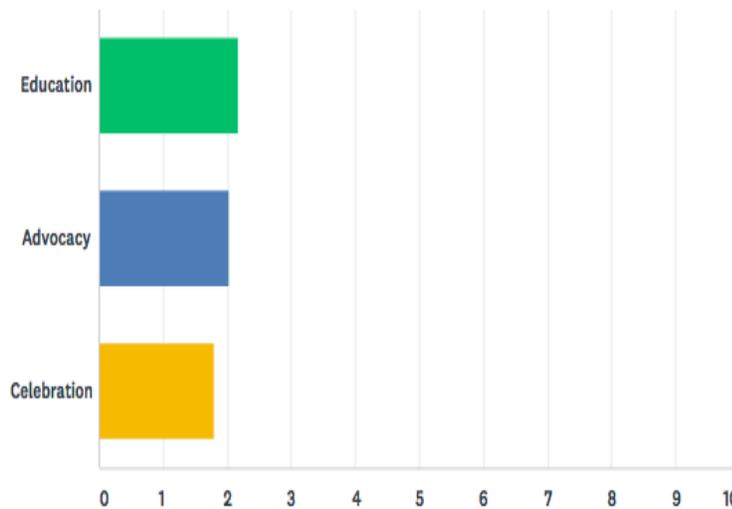
These results indicate that people who chose to complete the survey were mostly individuals who identified as part of the LGBTQI2S+ community. They were engaged in this community in a variety of ways. It is encouraging to note that of the 227 LGBTQI2S+ respondents, 26 had taken on leadership roles with the St. John's Pride board in the past.

## BOARD MANDATES IN ORDER OF IMPORTANCE

Questions 4 and 5 of the survey asked participants to rank the board's mandates in order of importance and to provide a rationale for the ranking. Results of the 272 responses suggest a close race between education (99) and advocacy (96) as first and second priorities, respectively, with celebration (134) as an important third.

**Q4 St. John's Pride has a three part mandate written into its constitution: education, advocacy, and celebration. Please rank these in order of importance:**

Answered: 272 Skipped: 3



*Figure 3. Q4: Board mandates in order of importance.*

Respondents' rationales showed that they considered education a prerequisite to advocacy. These mandates were also thought to overlap, and go hand in hand. Celebration was commonly thought of as a time for the community to observe and celebrate the advancements of LGBTQI2S+ rights locally, nationally, and internationally.

The survey raised questions for the report's authors, and there may be no consensus on the answers: Who do we want to educate and what do we want them to know? What do we want to advocate for, to whom, and on whose behalf? What is worthy of celebration and what still remains to be done before we can truly celebrate? It is possible that there was no major difference between education and advocacy as priorities because of an ambivalence or lack of clarity in the education and advocacy mandates. Demographic change might also affect the order of these mandates in the future.

Further conversations may be needed on this matter before the results can inform the board's priorities for event planning.

## POLICE IN UNIFORM AT PRIDE

A majority of respondents believed that the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary (RNC) and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) should be allowed to march in uniform at the Pride parade. Of the 275 people who completed the survey, 274 answered this question. There were 161 “Yes” responses and 72 “No” responses; 41 were “Unsure.”

### Q6 Should police (i.e. RNC, RCMP) be allowed to march in uniform in the St. John's Pride Sunday Parade?

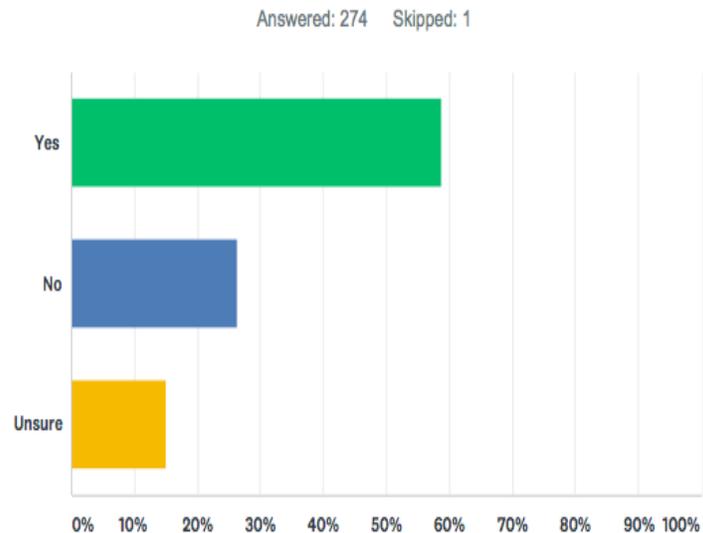


Figure 4. Q6: Police presence at Pride, in or out of uniform.

Respondents to the survey offered comments on this question, both here and under Question 9, “What the Incoming Board Should Know.” We combine this feedback from both sections here.

Varying rationales were provided for why the police should or should not be allowed to march in uniform. The rationales were grounded in an awareness of historical and contemporary realities of the relationship between the police and the LGBTQI2S+ community, both locally and nationally.

Most written responses were in favour of the police marching in the Pride parade. The underlying rationale was a desire for inclusion—and not exclusion—of certain groups and organizations. Banning groups or organizations for their past actions was interpreted by respondents as regressive, not progressive. While the injustices of the past should not be forgotten, respondents indicated it was necessary to learn from them and move forward.

Some respondents remarked that excluding LGBTQI2S+ police officers from Pride would be hypocritical and counterproductive to community building. Others argued against conflating the police as an institution with officers who are members of the LGBTQI2S+ community, and called for a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between the two. One respondent said:

*It makes me very disappointed when I hear of groups being excluded or banned from Pride celebrations. We must remember the past, learn from the past but not live in the past. If groups are excluded, where does it end? Do we ban those who identify as Roman Catholic, given the church's current official stance? Do we ban people of German heritage, because of the atrocities of the Holocaust? How far do we go back and how broad do we go when the banned list is being drawn? If any group is banned from Pride, as someone who remembers and who lived through the Toronto riots, the HIV/AIDS crisis of the 80s and 90s, etc., I would not be attending. For me, such an act takes away my sense of pride and replaces it with shame. We should strive to be better than this and embrace inclusion, welcoming and peaceful actions.*

Alongside the concern and interest for the police to march in Pride, a number of dissenting voices vehemently opposed police involvement and participation. They queried the implications of the message sent to vulnerable members of the LGBTQI2S+ community (e.g., trans, Indigenous, and non-White racialized people) if the police, as an institution, were permitted to march in uniform. One respondent explained his position this way:

*Police regularly mistreat sex workers, transgender people and people of colour. Consider that next time you want to lick their boots. Law enforcement is the friend of those in power. They are not there for you or me.*

So, far from being an open-and-shut case, this seemed to be a complex issue that required a fuller discussion.

## **NUMBER OF PRIDE EVENTS**

Respondents were asked about the number of events they believed should be planned for Pride. Of the 265 respondents who answered the question, 116 indicated 4 to 6 events. The next top answer choice was between eight and 12 events, with 94 people in favour of this option. However, 32 people considered that 12 or more events should be planned for Pride.

## Q7 How many events should St. John's Pride organize during Pride Week?

Answered: 265 Skipped: 10

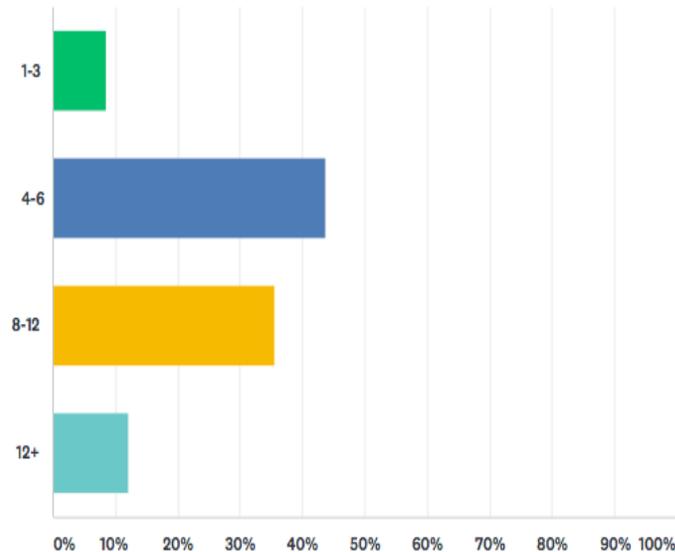


Figure 5. Q7: Number of Pride events.

Figure 5 should be interpreted with the current and past state of affairs in mind. Community members who serve on the St. John's Pride board do so as volunteers. Their level of commitment to the board might not be as high as if they were paid employees. As well, the organization's financial situation has always been tenuous. The lack of financial resources adds to the challenge of what the board can and cannot do. In the face of persisting fiscal constraints, it is important for the incoming board to balance the wishes of the community with its financial obligations. Without strong financial support (e.g., from City Council) or a sustainable financial plan to raise funds, it would be prudent for the board to limit the number of pride events and to execute the few well within budget.

## STAYING CONNECTED TO THE LGBTQI2S+ COMMUNITY

Responses to this survey question were solicited qualitatively. Participants were asked to enter their responses in written form. Of the 275 respondents, 240 people completed the question and 35 skipped it. Many useful suggestions were made. A thematic analysis was done to identify the data's most recurring themes or patterns.

## **Surveys and Community Consultations**

Many ideas were put forward for how the St. John's Pride board could stay connected to community interests. By far, the most consistent suggestion was for Pride to conduct surveys and community consultations like the ones being reported here. Many applauded the current initiative and found that it was a good way for the board to gain input from the broader community, apart from the annual general meeting. Such consultations or meetings could be monthly or quarterly, and need not always be formal. One suggestion was for the St. John's Pride board to hold a town-hall session after Pride to debrief and to hear from the community about what worked and did not work.

## **Online Communication Channels**

Social media and electronic communication was another popular idea for staying connected with community interests. Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter were examples of the platforms recommended for disseminating and soliciting feedback from the community. In addition, some suggested that the board should include email as part of its communication strategy. Online newsletters that highlight local events, news, and issues would allow the board to show that it is connected to the community. Also, the board's meeting could be live-streamed as a way to engage the constituency; and board members could post frequent video statements of their progress and future plans on the St. John's Pride website, which should be regularly updated.

## **Television, Radio, and Print Media**

Similarly, it was recommended that the Pride board connect with the community by becoming more visible. Appearances on radio talk shows, on television, and in newspaper advertisements could help to promote the interests of the community to the broader public.

## **Funding, Office Space, and Hiring Staff**

Other ideas for how the board could stay connected to the community included hiring staff, possibly provided by city funds, which could support the board of directors and enable St. John's Pride to offer programs and education throughout the year and not just at Pride.

## **Engaging the Broader Public and Marginalized Groups**

The participation of the Pride board at wider community events was stressed, as a way of building connections and relationships with other local groups, including city and town councils. This type of public engagement could help to improve the board's overall visibility and connect it to other social justice issues outside of the LGBTQI2S+ community.

Moreover, many felt that the engagement of other marginalized groups in the LGBTQI2S+ community should be prioritized. In particular, the voices of youth, older adults, trans, nonbinary, Indigenous, and non-White racialized groups in urban and rural areas should be amplified, to drive support for their struggles. This focus could help Pride integrate intersectionality into its work and mandates, as well as encourage the involvement of these groups on the Pride board.

Staying connected to community interests requires knowing their concerns and issues in order to accurately represent them in the public sphere. Banning police from Pride or demanding of an apology from the police over the Village Shopping Centre incident was seen as a matter that should have been brought to the community to debate and decide on prior to any position being taken by the board on behalf of the community. Future decisions, it was suggested, should be made with the community in mind.

Finally, there was the recognition that the LGBTQI2S+ community must do its part in supporting the board to accomplish its mandates. The board, respondents said, could not be expected to do this work alone. Rather, community members must be active participants in all areas of concern to the community, and not just when there is a problem.

## **WHAT THE INCOMING BOARD SHOULD KNOW**

Similar to the previous question, responses to this survey question were solicited qualitatively; participants were asked to enter their responses in written form. Of the total 275 respondents, 202 people completed the question and 73 skipped it. A thematic analysis was done to identify recurring themes or patterns in the data. Below, in no particular order, are the points that respondents wanted the incoming board to know.

### **Inclusion Not Exclusion**

Many respondents noted the diversity within the LGBTQI2S+ community and the importance of celebrating this diversity rather than being dismissive of it.

Specifically, regardless of the group's shared LGBTQI2S+ identity, its constituents are not homogenous. The Pride board should keep this diversity and difference in mind and not assume that community members all think in the same way. One respondent expressed:

*Just because we are all LGBTQI2S+ does not mean we all think the same. We are unique individuals.*

Embracing the different views and opinions of community members was seen as promoting a healthy culture of inclusion, which would help to strengthen the group's dynamics and ensure that the focus remained firmly on the board's mandates. Definitions of inclusion are still being explored within the community, especially as they relate to police in the Pride parade.

### **Importance of Community Space and Pride to Self-Identity**

Several respondents noted that the absence of a physical space, building, or structure for the LGBTQI2S+ community posed a challenge to the group's ability to come together in a collective manner. Such a space could function as a hub for different kinds of activities, including a meeting space for people to assemble and socialize with each other. One survey respondent said:

*Maybe create a city space for LGBTQI2S+ reading, writing, and other creations. Have two computers if possible. I think LGBTQI2S+ spaces are disappearing but they are still valuable and create continuity and education between different ages in the LGBTQI2S+ community.*

It was also felt that this lack of space made it difficult to achieve two out of the three board mandates—advocacy and education. This was not seen as an issue that Facebook alone could solve. Rather, the board is challenged to find additional and complementary ways for these mandates to be met and communicated to the entire LGBTQI2S+ key community and not just to people at Memorial University and to the status quo, White, agreeable, constituency.

Some respondents also spoke to the importance of the Pride parade as pivotal to their coming-out process and identity formation. They wanted this annual event to continue and feared that internal strife and dissension might lead it to fall apart. One respondent remarked:

*The Pride parade has meant so much to me over the course of my coming-out process. I never want [Pride] to fall apart. But I do want to see more of our community represented.*

On a broader scale, it was expressed that Pride fosters an awareness that can create a safer and more inclusive society for all. However, it was suggested that more work was needed to make the environment at Pride welcoming to underage individuals who might feel unwelcome or intimidated. Finally, respondents indicated the need for greater visibility of Pride throughout the year and not only in July, during Pride Week. The point here was that the St. John's Pride board needed to become more visible in the community and not only when Pride cycles around, as per past practice.

### **You Are Seen, Loved, and Appreciated**

Amidst criticisms of internal strife and dissension, many respondents spoke to the importance of the board's work in the community. The board, it was suggested, represented the voice of the LGBTQI2S+ community to the general public. Board members were encouraged to keep up the good work for equality and to know that their efforts did not go unnoticed. The fact that board members volunteered their time was acknowledged and appreciated, since its hard work often went unvalued. One respondent said:

*Thank you to all the people who have given their life force and time to help create events for the community, and who are stepping up now at an uncomfortable time to try and repair and rebuild. I know it is often thankless work, and that you hear more complaints and attacks than appreciation. . . . I really appreciate the passion and care and courage that goes into stepping up to try and rebuild this organization right now.*

Board members were also encouraged to take care of themselves and not feel that they had to carry the weight of the community's problems on their shoulders. The larger community, it was remarked, had a responsibility to support the board in achieving its mandates, by being actively involved in its work.

### **Stay Out of Politics**

An overwhelming majority of participants stated their desire for the board to stay out of politics—to become apolitical—where community members had yet to discuss divisive issues, or where there was as yet no consensus.

This sentiment was echoed in relation to whether the police should be allowed to march in Pride or not, and also to a lesser degree about the request for an apology regarding the 1993 Village Shopping Centre incident. Here we simply note that several respondents stated their readiness to distance themselves from Pride should the incoming board proceed with the agenda of banning the police or other groups and organizations from Pride.

Rather than politics, the Pride board was asked to focus its energy on less politically charged issues, such as organizing Pride bonfires and parades: in other words, fun. Indeed, some respondents posed the question: “*Where did all the fun go?*”

### **Community Sensitization to Trans Issues Through Education**

Several respondents commented on the importance of education and activism about trans issues. They said that trans people still face stigma and experience opposition to their gender identity and expression, which makes it difficult for them to feel safe in their bodies and in society at large. Respondents felt that the Pride board could work towards a better environment, educating and sensitizing the public to trans issues. It was suggested that this effort should extend to high schools, especially in rural areas, where trans students are most likely to encounter stigmatization and resistance for being themselves. One respondent observed:

*Children in high schools are still suffering from the stigma of not being understood, being different, especially trans kids. People finally understand and accept homosexuality. It is about attraction. They don't understand trans. More education and compassion is needed for this group. Gains have been made but we're not done yet.*

Some respondents noted that since same-sex marriage has been legalized, the struggle for trans equality in relation to mental health care and transition-related health care (such as hormones and surgery) seems to have waned in general.

### **Accessibility**

Some respondents discussed the importance of making events and activities sponsored by the Pride board more accessible to groups commonly excluded or misrecognized in the LGBTQI2S+ community. These include Indigenous and non-White racialized people, immigrants and refugees, trans people, people with disability, and young children. There was also a call for the Pride board to attend to issues of race and racism and how these play out in its decision-making process. One respondent commented:

*Please take into account that there is privilege within the queer community. White gay cis males have it better than, for example, a trans person of colour. The board should always keep this in mind. It may cause some fuss and some people may not be happy about it, but remember, cis gay males disrupted societal norms for years and look how far they've come.*

Tied to this concern was the need for information and transparency about board nominations and elections, as a way to encourage more people from different social, political, education, racial/ethnic, and religious backgrounds to participate. Ultimately, a focus on accessibility would improve the participation of groups that, despite their interest in being active members of the LGBTQI2S+ community, have not felt welcomed to do so.

### **Board Development, Community Relationship, and Accountability**

Inclusion, communication, engagement, and community building sum up what respondents felt were key to the board's success. Respondents noted the inclination of past boards to vacillate in its decisions, or to make decisions without consultation or research into the concerns raised. For the board to repair its reputation and again be seen as legitimate, consistent, transparent, and clear communication between the board and members of the LGBTQI2S+ community was important. One respondent said:

*It's utterly pitiful that St. John's Pride needs a crisis management team. This organization has been troubled almost without exception since it was created. If Pride wants to escape this laughable ignominy, it should figure out its politics and priorities, and proceed with a clear-eyed conviction, without such obvious displays of uncertainty and lassitude.*

Respondents suggested that a diversity of perspectives, bodies, and lived experiences on the board would make it more representative and inclusive of the communities being served. In the past, board members often pushed their individual agendas, or those of their close group. This was repeatedly denounced, in favour of a unified vision that took seriously all voices, but especially those of marginalized groups such as trans, two-spirit, and non-White racialized people. One respondent remarked:

*Your job is not to make your own voice heard but to make space for and share/amplify the voices of your membership organization. This includes raising the voices of marginalized populations to have equal footing (or greater) with those traditionally having more power.*

People felt that continuity of Pride activities from year to year was in need of attention. Some felt that having new board members each year hindered the stability needed to build on previous years' work. As part of community building, current and future board members should reach out to former board members to learn from past administrations to avoid making the same mistakes.

Suggestions were also made to reopen the St. John's Pride Inc. bylaws with respect to the board's structure. This matter is further discussed below in the section "Board's Structure and Change."

Respondents also felt it was important for board members to have a deeper understanding of St. John's Pride as part of a larger community. Knowing this would have implications for Pride programs, activities and mandates, and the potential to facilitate relationship building with individuals, groups, and businesses that can be champions for change in the community.

The point was also made that parents of LGBTQI2S+ people needed support, which they cannot seem to find. One respondent reported:

*Parents need supports. They need to be educated and have a safe place to talk to one another. I have wanted this but cannot seem to find any groups. I think that there should be support groups available. Not only to LGBTQI2S+ individuals, but also the parents of said individuals. This could provide an educational and helpful place for people that need support from others in similar circumstances to reiterate that "you are not alone."*

For these parents, the lack of a safe and open space to talk to others and receive support was another area for improvement.

## **VOLUNTEERING FOR ST. JOHN'S PRIDE BOARD**

The 275 survey respondents were asked if they would be willing to volunteer for the Pride board. Their responses were recorded and summarized in the graph below.

Most respondents said they were unwilling to volunteer for the Pride board. Of the 266 responses recorded, only 68 said "Yes" to volunteering for the board. Eighty-five said they were "Unsure" about volunteering and 113 said "No" to volunteering for the board.

## Q10 Would you be willing to volunteer for the Pride Board?

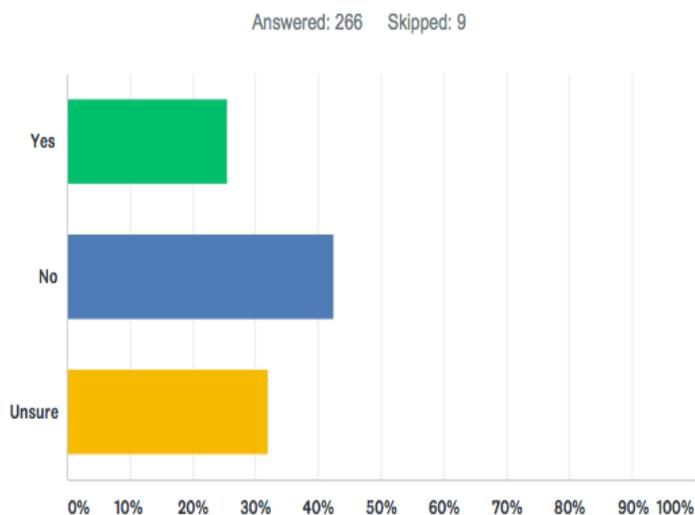


Figure 6. Q10: Willingness to volunteer for the Pride board.

Nevertheless, an encouraging proportion of respondents (68) were or might be (85) willing to consider volunteering for the Pride board. However, comments from the qualitative section of the survey also revealed a range of reasons that made some respondents reluctant to volunteer. These included previous negative experiences on the board, such as poor coordination and function; lack of time due to other commitments; and a general impression of the Pride board as dismissive, exclusionary, and volatile, with a weak structure of accountability for board members.

From the total number of responses collected, it is clear that the LGBTQI2S+ community is active online, suggesting that this platform is a good way to engage members about the board and its work on behalf of the community. However, this focus should be balanced with other modes of communication and community engagement strategies, such as a community dialogue or forum, with attention paid to issues of accessibility whether based on disability, affordability of computers and Internet access, or geographic barriers.

It should also be acknowledged that the work of the crisis management team was facilitated with the timely support of additional volunteers recruited through the crisis management process. With the board already stretched, the community must be mindful of asking them for additional labour.

Having presented the results of the community survey, we now turn our attention to the findings from the community dialogue.

# **FINDINGS FROM ST. JOHN'S COMMUNITY DIALOGUE**

The community dialogue meeting of March 11, 2018, brought together members of the LGBTQI2S+ community around the core focus of renewal, with the objective of soliciting ideas and feedback about steps that should be taken by the incoming board to ensure its success and the sustainable growth and development of the St. John's Pride board generally. To facilitate the dialogue, community members were divided into six different groups, with roughly seven people in each group. At the conclusion of the small group discussions, a representative from each group reported back to the larger audience on the group's thoughts or recommendations. The written records from the dialogue were collected and analyzed for recurring themes. The findings are presented below.

## **THREE PILLARS OF PRIDE**

Community members acknowledged the importance of the three pillars—advocacy, education, and celebration—of the board's work. Most, if not all, continued to support these mandates as foundational to the board's legitimacy. However, concerns were raised about each that might prove instructive to the incoming board.

For example, many commented on the lack of an inclusive advocacy. Past boards were observed to have operated in a top-down fashion; advocacy was not community driven. In addition, the failure of past boards to engage community partners and organizations doing advocacy work in the province was seen as shortsighted. Reaching out to these community partners and organizations and promoting community-driven advocacy amongst LGBTQI2S+ members was viewed as critical to renewal.

Members expressed a need for clarity around education. Is the goal for the board to provide education to the larger public on LGBTQI2S+ issues and concerns, or for board members to educate themselves on issues that affect the LGBTQI2S+ community? Regardless, people observed that earlier boards had been ineffective in both areas. They suggested that these boards offered little, if any, education or training. Also, they were not seen to have made concerted efforts to learn about the work of community members, partners, and organizations. As a result, they demonstrated little knowledge of the community they were elected to represent.

Future boards, they said, should seek to facilitate informative, accessible, and inclusive community spaces. Furthermore, the board could take a leadership role in educating LGBTQI2S+ community members about positions on the St. John's Pride board and demystify the electoral process for everyone, but especially those considering a volunteer position on the board.

Finally, it was important to consider the impact that a lack of funding might have on the board's ability to undertake educational programs or activities. On this, as well as on other issues discussed above, some clarity on the purpose of the education mandate could help to define the way forward.

When it came to celebration, people emphasized how important it was for the board to operate within its fiscal limits. This meant thinking in practical terms and organizing smaller events better and within or under budget. Beyond a concern for fiscal control and management, after Pride, there was the sense of a need for recharging. This is the time for the community to regroup and focus on struggles that have yet to be won.

## **ENGAGING THE CONSTITUENCY AND COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS**

There was a clear consensus among participants at the community dialogue regarding the need for better outreach by the Pride board to members of the LGBTQI2S+ community and the broader public. Concerns were expressed that, in the past, the board had demonstrated poor leadership in this area. Community members emphasized the importance of the board "talking with people," as a way to be inclusive of diverse voices in its work and decision making. For example, the board should look to connect with queer subgroups in the community whose voices are not being heard (e.g., people with disability, trans, Indigenous, and non-White racialized people). Similarly, the point was made that the Pride board needed to engage with stakeholders in the broader community, who are not necessarily members of the LGBTQI2S+ community, to build relationships that can be leveraged to advance board goals and mandates. Ultimately, the message conveyed to the board was for more discussions and conversations within and outside of the LGBTQI2S+ community as a way to build spaces where everyone belongs.

## **BOARD'S STRUCTURE AND CHANGE**

The community spoke convincingly about the need for organizational and structural change.

One suggestion made through the online survey was to reopen the constitution and reconsider the board's structure. Rather than the current, flat, board structure, St. John's Pride might want to consider a structure with a president or executive director. One respondent stated:

*Flat boards have continued to fall apart; there is a general mentality of sharing the glory but no responsibility when difficulties arise. There should be a meeting regarding the constitution specifically and two alternatives are offered: a flat board as is structured presently, and a board with a president or executive director.*

However the board decided to proceed, it would be important to hear from the community at large, as there are pros and cons to having a board with an informal hierarchy and one with a defined hierarchy. The size of the board is also important to consider. Where a traditional hierarchical board structure might work in a mid- to large-size organization, how effective would it be in the context of a small-scale, volunteer-run organization like St. John's Pride?

A different suggestion was that the board must recognize its function as a management board (as opposed to a governance board). As such, it makes operational and policy decisions, keeps itself educated and informed, and maintains well-documented recommendations and information. With this in mind, some of the organization's vision, mission, and strategic planning goals would need to be narrowed to revolve more around management goals and responsibility.

To support the board in the proposed management role, advisory committees could be used. These committees would be comprised of experienced individuals who could provide knowledge about the specific needs of different parts of our community, help train members of the board, fill skill gaps, and provide guidance on how certain community members might want to participate in Pride.

Under the current arrangement, there is a concern that the events organized by Pride do not correspond with all the needs of our community. Of the current traditional Pride events, the priorities identified by the community were the parade, the bonfire, and the flag raisings. But in addition to this, some community members would like further events that are family friendly, accessible, educational, inclusive, alcohol free, and that create a safe space. Recognizing the board's limitations, it was suggested that other community groups work with the board to fill these gaps in programming.

Others noted that the board should focus on its finances. In particular, the board needs an experienced person to take on the role of co-chair of finance. This person could also be part of an advisory committee that helps guide the board in best

practices. This role requires very specific expertise, and in the past, board members who took on this responsibility without necessary supports have struggled.

Many other board members in the past, coming to the task with little prior experience, have also suffered from the absence of needed supports. This has led to friction on the board; many board members have left before the end of their terms. An advisory committee could assist with training in best practices of running a board and creating an environment that could foster positive discussion on subjects that cause conflict, while continuing to work towards a solution.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The community survey and community dialogue both revealed important information for the incoming board to consider, as it works toward the engagement of community members in shaping the future of the St. John's Pride board. Here are their recommendations to the St. John's Pride board.

### **The Immediate Task: Pride Week 2018**

In view of the short timeline and limited funds currently available, events managed directly by the board for Pride Week 2018 should be limited to a small number of core events. Other groups within the community should be encouraged to offer "affiliate" or "community events" that would be publicized through the Pride Week schedule. This same model could be followed as well for future years. Events that have been suggested as core include:

- Flag-raising ceremonies at City Hall and Confederation Building.
- Bonfire night.
- Pride parade, followed by Pride in the Park (which need not include programmed events, but still needs arrangements made with the City).

### **Building for Continuity**

In the process of working towards Pride Week 2018, the new board will have to build a new culture and new work practices. Indeed, if there is any mercy in the collapse of the previous board, it is that the "reboot" allows for a fresh start and the hope of a healthier organization. Know that as you are working for this year, you are building for the future as well. If you build a board culture that is respectful, positive, and effective in accomplishing its tasks, members will enjoy the work, they will want to stay on, and new members will want to join in.

## **Rebuilding the Board**

### ***Culture***

- Should be calm, inclusive, and respectful of all members.
- Annual training:
  - May be available through Community Sector Council or through provincial government.
  - Emphasize working and communicating respectfully across ideological differences.
  - Practical training on the operation of a volunteer organization, how boards function and the roles of individual members.
  - Could include overview of queer identities and local LGBTQI2S+ history.

### ***Work Process***

- The board's job is to be a working group tasked with event planning for Pride Week, and that work needs to be shared among board members.
- Financial management has been poorly done in the past and needs a complete rebuild. Suggestions arising from the community include:
  - Co-chair finance needs adequate skills and experience. Should this necessary skill set not be found among elected board members, expertise and mentorship can be sought from members of our larger community who have offered to serve in this capacity.
  - As a not-for-profit, Pride should have a business number and be filing annual corporation income tax returns.
  - Consider having a membership fee.
  - Charge admission for parade floats and groups to cover costs.
  - Create a fundraising/donation/sponsorship package.
  - Incentive card, annually recognized, with long term sponsoring businesses.

- Build internal documentation of how-to-do Pride events, maintain it on an appropriate platform, and establish a process for its transmission for future years.
  - Consult past board members who have indicated their willingness to act as resources (Taylor Stocks, Pamela Sheaves, Gary Hall, and others).
- May establish advisory committees that include members of the larger Pride community who have offered to assist with particular tasks.
- Maintain collaboration with groups such as Inclusion NL to make Pride as accessible to all as possible.
- In order to maintain sustainability from one year to the next, actively recruit possible board members in advance of the annual general meeting (AGM) and encourage them to offer themselves for election. Potential candidates should be approached with an eye to nurturing a balance of skills, ages, identities, and viewpoints on the board. An information document including a job description and an indication of the time requirement could be prepared to help in the recruitment process.

### **Rebuilding Community Relationships**

- Maintain positive relationships with organizations in the larger community such as the province and the City of St. John's. This requires timely communication and compliance with application processes, timelines, and regulations.
- Work to cultivate positive relationships with partner groups within the LGBTQI2S+ community, such as Raise Up Fundraising, the Rad Pride group, Valhalla Tavern, the AIDS Committee of Newfoundland and Labrador, the Out In Faith Committee, and the Womyn's Station among many more examples. This includes welcoming contributions to Pride Week events, responding in a timely way to correspondence, promoting the events, and providing assistance when asked, as the board's capacity allows.
- Consultation and dialogue with the Pride community should be an ongoing commitment of the board. This process could be carried out by a Pride community consultation committee that would include at least one board liaison, but also other members of the community who can be seen as more impartial facilitators. Modes of consultation could include an annual survey and town hall meetings as needed. This committee could also facilitate

discussions at the AGM and might take part in recruiting potential board members.

- The AGM is a key point of connection between the board and the community. In the past, AGMs have been poorly attended and sometimes very confrontational. Careful consideration should be taken to ensure that in future:
  - AGMs need to be well advertised, with sufficient lead time.
  - AGMs need to take place in an accessible space.
  - They need to be located in a public, central, preferably off-campus place. While MUN spaces have often been used, the university setting can be difficult to navigate for those who are not familiar with it. Common Grounds and the Benevolent Irish Society have served us well, and further options may be identified through collaboration with organizations such as Empower NL.
  - Arrangements for childcare need to be considered.
  - A cooldown space should be provided, especially if challenging topics need to be discussed.
  - Facilitators should be well-prepared and skilled in conflict management.
  - Care should be taken to make the physical environment of the AGM emotionally welcoming and positive. Music, decorations, and snacks could all be used.

## **Ongoing Concerns**

### ***Police and Pride***

The consultation meetings of the past months have focused on community building and the nuts and bolts of festival management. The difficult controversy over the relationship between the police and Pride has not been addressed, and continues to cause considerable distress. We believe this matter will continue to fester until we can talk to each other about it, face to face. We note that, as the recent request for an apology on the Village Shopping Centre bathroom incident demonstrates, the Pride parade has rightly or wrongly become a tool to limit police presence. The appropriateness of this strategy warrants discussion, to assess its utility for police-community relations going forward. Thus, we recommend that a follow-up

community meeting should be held in the next few months on the relationship between the LGBTQI2S+ community and the police. This meeting could be called either directly by the St. John's Pride board or by the Pride community consultation committee.

### ***The Mandates of St. John's Pride***

Longer-term aspirations also emerged from the community consultation process. People envisioned an organization whose purpose would extend beyond a one-week festival, to serve as a political voice, advocating and representing our community. It would also act as a coordinating centre for resources that serve our community. Recognizing the power of these aspirations, we nevertheless recommend that current and future boards should both be very clear about the level of organizational development that would be needed before St. John's Pride has the capacity to expand its role beyond festival management. Indeed, many of the expectations expressed by community members at this time are well beyond the St. John's Pride mandates; far beyond its financial and volunteer capability; and, in some instances, may have already been addressed and gone overlooked. Thus, the board should steadfastly resist getting drawn into such roles unless they are very certain that the necessary foundation for them has already been built. It may be that those roles would be best served by a separate organization altogether, allowing St. John's Pride to remain focused on festival organization. Likewise, the board may wish to better communicate its mandate and limitations to community members to better manage expectations.

### **Recommendations to the Community**

Our above recommendations are largely directed to the newly elected board. We would also like to offer some thoughts to the larger LGBTQI2S+ community.

We were much heartened in the recent crisis by the willingness of the community to participate in consultation meetings and in the survey, and by the number of individuals who offered personal expertise and assistance to the board or came forward for election. We are encouraged by the diversity of ages, skills, and experiences on the new board. We hope that this demonstration of community commitment to Pride will continue.

In recent years, the operation of Pride has been left largely to students. More experienced and skilled members of our community have stayed away (with some notable exceptions), leaving a group of young people whose skill sets do not match the expected labour, unsupported and unmentored, with a near-impossible task. We have been eating our young and, what's worse, we have been throwing them in a pit

with unscalable walls where they have little choice but to eat each other, while the rest of us stand around complaining about what a hash they are making of it.

St. John's Pride has the potential to be a training ground for our next generation of leaders, managers, activists, and community builders. But the rest of us have to show up and work with them.

## CONCLUSION

The data from the community survey and community dialogue uncovered a number of issues and concerns regarding the past management of St. John's Pride board. The situation reached a critical point when the board became nonoperational due to multiple resignations of board members. A St. John's Pride crisis management team was formed and began the process of refocusing the LGBTQI2S+ community to chart a new way forward. The incoming board now has a wealth of information to align its business practices with the expectations and aspirations of the community it is meant to represent.

To recapitulate, the board must strive, the best it can, to:

- Maintain consistent documentation for future boards and strictly enforce the requirement of departing board members to turn over all board-related documents and property.
- Educate community members on the process related to seeking a position on the board.
- Connect with other Pride groups or organizations (e.g., Rad Pride) in St. John's and surrounding areas to learn about their issues and concerns, and to build alliances. This may encourage participation from historically marginalized populations and contribute to a board that is more reflective of the LGBTQI2S+ community.
- Reach out to local businesses for partnership opportunities with the understanding that they may be limited in their financial support given the current fiscal situation of the province.
- Develop a sustainable fundraising plan such as a community gala that is inclusive and open to LGBTQI2S+ community and also the general public.

- Establish a robust communication plan by which board members are accountable to the community to prevent board members from pushing their own or groups' personal agendas under the guise of acting in the best interests of the LGBTQI2S+ community.
- Apply the policy within the bylaws regarding the removal of a board member that is disruptive, destructive, or demoralizing. This should be done before the legitimacy of the board is compromised or diminished.
- Review the effectiveness of the suggested flat-board structure against the idea of a president or executive director board structure.
- Consider implementing an advisory committee focused on governance, to allow the board to concentrate on the day-to-day management and operations of the board.
- Plan/organize a community forum to discuss police participation in Pride, either independently or in collaboration with the police (RNC and RCMP). Should police be allowed to participate in Pride in uniform?

If the board can work towards addressing the issues and concerns raised throughout this report, there is hope for rebuilding and strengthening community cohesion.