



The United Synagogue  
of Conservative Judaism

## USCJ Survey Results

### **How Welcoming Are We?**

A USCJ survey measuring inclusion of the  
LGBTQ\* community in our kehillot.

\*Lesbian ▪ Gay ▪ Bisexual ▪ Transgender ▪ Queer

Survey conducted December, 2013  
291 kehillot participating

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**האומר דבר בשם אומרו מביא גאולה לעולם (אבות ו:ו)**

*One who attributes sources brings deliverance to the world. Pirkei Avot 6:6*

## How Welcoming Are We? - A USCJ Survey

*“... in accordance with The Rabbinical Assembly and United Synagogue resolutions, we hereby affirm gays and lesbians are welcome in our congregations, youth groups, camps, and schools.”*

*Consensus Statement on Homosexuality, Committee on Jewish Law and Standards, EH 24.1992a*

The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism maintains contact with affiliated kehillot [congregations] through our Kehilla Relationship Managers. Questions about USCJ stands, policies and opinions are often raised in the course of their discussions. In the fall of 2013, following the Conversation of the Century Centennial celebration, our staff reported a significant rise in questions about inclusion of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer communities in our congregations. We were well aware of the 1992 statement of the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards, quoted above. It seemed appropriate to consider, some 21 years after the declaration, “how welcoming are we?” to the LGBTQ community.

We had been told that some kehillot are very welcoming, to anyone, regardless of sexual orientation; indeed, some kehillot had become known regionally or nationally for their welcome. We had also heard reports (but found it untenable) that most USJC kehillot were, at best, grudgingly accepting of the LGBTQ community. But we had no hard data. We undertook this survey to find out what was really happening in our kehillot. Are USCJ kehillot welcoming to the LGBTQ community, or do they just think they are?

The survey results included these key findings:

- The majority of Conservative kehillot (congregations), following the mandate of the 1992 of the Rabbinical Assembly Committee on Jewish Law and Standards (the Law Committee), are welcoming to the LGBTQ community. Their policies welcome Jews no matter their gender or sexual orientation. While that is true, many kehillot have materials and forms with non-inclusive language which often obscures those welcoming policies.
- An overwhelming majority of kehillot welcome life-cycle events for same-sex couples/families (i.e. baby naming, aufruf, aliyot for both members of a couple), even if the rabbi does not perform marriage ceremonies for same sex couples.
- Kehillot report having members and / or staff members who have “come out.”
- The results indicate that neither location (urban or suburban; location in North America) nor kehillah size have significant impact on the spirit of welcoming and inclusion.
- Clergy and staff of kehillot report being open, inclusive and welcoming to members of the LGBTQ community.
- Few institutions have had formal training in how to be welcoming of the LGTBQ community.
- Kehilla rabbis are generally available for halakhic queries on LGBTQ issues.
- Despite a more welcoming atmosphere and policies toward the LGBTQ community, there is still much ground to cover to be fully welcoming to all members of the Jewish community.

We hope that communities will move forward and take proactive steps to assure that our congregations are *deliberately inclusive* and *deliberately welcoming* of all Jews.

We recognized that we did not have the expertise to compose questions which could best help us find out the information we were seeking. We approached Keshet [<http://www.keshetonline.org>], a national grassroots organization that works for the full equality and inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) Jews in Jewish life, to help us. As a result, the core questions of the survey were based on a series of questions that Keshet developed to help congregations and schools determine how welcoming they are to the LGBTQ community.

The *How Welcoming Are We* survey was conducted mid-December 2013. We sent invitations to participate to rabbis, cantors, executive directors, presidents and program directors; we also placed notices in our district newsletters. The introduction to the survey as it appeared on-line is note #1, page 7.

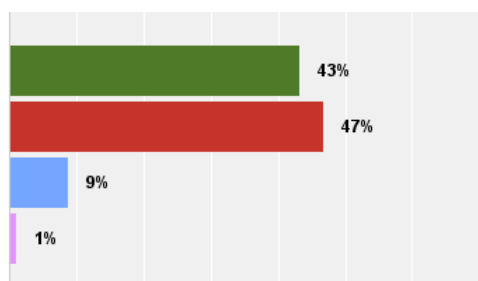
We received 450 responses in less than a week; we removed responses which did not provide a telephone number (We use telephone numbers to assure only one answer per congregation. We state that surveys without a phone number will be discarded.). After we removed duplicates, we had responses from some 50 percent of our congregations. Responses came from across the continent, with good representation of all sizes and locations of congregations. Both synagogue staff and lay leadership participated in the survey.

The questions inquired about a wide variety of subjects, including physical spaces in buildings, how forms are written and comfort level of staff / clergy on various issues. We asked about training for dealing with LGBTQ inclusion. Given that synagogue staff members tend to be caring and well-meaning individuals, would a lack of training demonstrate itself in the results? We believe it does; the impact of that lack of training seems clear in the results of many of the questions. For example, even as kehilla policies are welcoming, there are still kehillot which have not even taken such simple steps as revising language on forms (changing to parent1-parent2 or member1-member2) to make them more welcoming. Training in LGBTQ inclusion would likely mitigate such oversights.

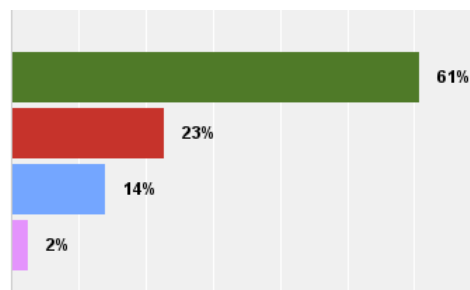
## Results

The responses reflected the overall distribution of USCJ kehillot in location, size and distribution of urban/suburban communities. The West Coast (the Pacific Southwest and Northern Pacific regions) was slightly under represented. As we reviewed the data, comparing answers from USCJ districts in different parts of North America, we found that with the exception of staff training, there are very few regional differences in the answers. The synagogues are well aligned in terms of their policies and the extent to which they reach out to the LGBTQ community. Charts with the results of the questions are in the appendix on pages 10 and 11; charts with results by district in the appendix, beginning on page 12.

Some 60% of kehillot report members who are out (openly identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer); that shows a level of comfort at those kehillot. We assume that there are members of the LGBTQ community in the other of kehillot, but they are not comfortable being open about their sexual orientation in those kehillot. While the majority of kehillot have members who are out, very few kehillot have either special programming for the LGBTQ community or an inclusion committee to help guide the congregation along the path to inclusion.



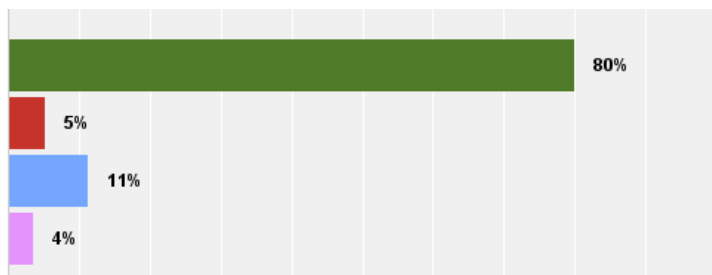
*We have staff, leaders, or board members who are out as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer.*



*We have students/members who are out as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer.*

■ Yes ■ No ■ Not sure ■ N/A

Some 80% of kehillot have membership policies which allow two same sex adults who are married or consider themselves to be married to be have a family / household membership. This is a policy which shows the policies of the kehillot are welcoming. Nearly 70% of kehillot are ready to rent facilities to non-member same-sex couples for celebrations. (That number is not fully representative of attitude as a number of respondents told us they do not rent to non-members at all.) Synagogue clergy members are prepared to meet and work with all members of the community. Over 70% are available for halakhic questions and celebrations (rites of passage and joint aliyot) for same-sex couples.



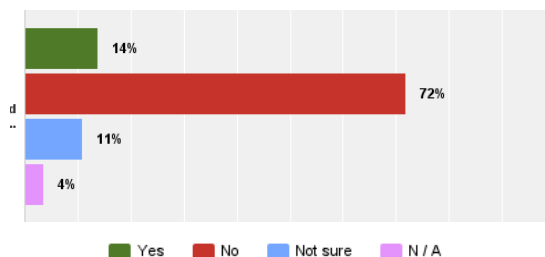
*We allow two same sex adults who are married or consider themselves to be married to be have a family / household membership*

■ Yes ■ No ■ Not sure ■ N / A

Within Conservative Judaism, there is a variety of opinions about the halakhic acceptability of same-sex weddings. We asked a series of questions to see if we could pinpoint how the rabbis feel. Fifteen percent note having halakhic reservations about performing a Jewish union [either marriage or commitment ceremony] for a same-sex couple; with that 15%, a full 50% support civil unions.

There is widespread availability [77%] of personal counselling for LGBTQ individuals and families. Two-thirds of our professional leadership is willing to advocate for LGBTQ rights. Taken together, we find a picture of USCJ kehillot which is well on the way to fulfilling the 1992 mandate of welcoming the LGBTQ community into our kehillot. We are well beyond what many suggested was a universally unwelcoming atmosphere.

While those results show a significant spirit of welcoming, many other results demonstrate that our kehillot are not yet fully welcoming. There has been very little staff training [14%] in how to be inclusive of the LGBTQ community in our kehillot. It is likely that many of the issues still to be resolved could be mitigated with an increased sensitivity among clergy and staff.



*Our staff has received training on LGBTQ inclusion.*

Most kehillot do not have written anti-discrimination policies regarding either sexual orientation or gender identity. Very few congregations [15%] take steps to actively promote themselves or their activities in LGBTQ media. While this result could be because of an unwillingness to be openly recruit those individuals, it is consistent with a general reluctance among kehillot to advertise for members outside of traditional Jewish media.

While the majority of kehillot have members or staff who are out, kehillot are not likely to have made accommodations for LGBTQ students. Fewer than a third of kehillot include anti-LGBTQ bullying and harassment in their anti-bullying training; only a quarter of kehillot have placed LGBTQ issues in their education programming or curricula. It is likely that there are few discussions in our religious schools about the Jewish way to welcome the *other* into our groups.

We recognize that for youth conventions, there are significant, complex issues regarding assigning roommates in hotels or homes. USY behavioral policies prohibit sexual activity between teen-participants. As such, couples are not allowed to share a hotel room. It is easy to enforce that rooming policy for opposite gender couples; rooming requests by same sex couples becomes much more complex.

Just 30% of kehillot have an all-gender / unisex / non-gendered bathroom. We recognize that to add such a facility would require a major change in their physical plant perhaps costing a sizeable amount of

money, especially to meet local building codes. This remains an area which will often have to wait until a building renovation or congregational move takes place.

## **Next Steps**

### *Becoming Intentionally Inviting*

In their book *The First Days of School*, Harry K. and Rosemary T. Wong describe four levels of invitational education.<sup>2</sup> Although the book speaks specifically to schools, these four levels can certainly be applied to kehillot as well. Using the Wongs' language, the goal of each kehillah should be to become *intentionally inviting* to all Jews.

Based on our survey, we know that few, if any, of our kehillot are intentionally disinviting. None of the kehillot participating indicated that they exclude members of the LGBTQ community as a matter of policy. The overwhelming majority of kehillot allow a same-sex couple that is married or consider themselves to be married to take a family membership. Kehillot allow rites of passage for members of non-traditional families, even in kehillot where the clergy does not feel that halakha permits same-sex marriage.

However, many of our kehillot are *unintentionally disinviting*. They believe their doors are wide open; indeed, by policy, they are. There is, however, a gap between being intentionally inviting and unintentionally disinviting. A kehillah can be unintentionally disinviting in subtle ways. Kehillot should take steps to assure that the language in membership applications and program forms are intentionally inviting [use member 1 / member 2]. School forms should use inclusive terms [parent 1 / parent 2 instead of mother / father]. Programs should be priced to be welcoming to non-traditional families [price per person, not by couple or family]. All of these simple steps demonstrate a very welcoming message to everyone in the community.

When people of good will genuinely open the doors of the kehillah to the community, people can sense that and react well. That said, an inviting community should not be predicated on happenstance; to be an intentionally inviting community takes determined effort and willingness to rethink policies and approaches across the board. An increase in inclusion-training of clergy and staff will help provide the sensitivity to detect the areas which are unintentionally uninviting.

Materials are available to help kehillot ensure that their programming and communications are friendly to the LGBTQ community. A statement of philosophy which explains the use of language in materials is another important step to demonstrate that the congregation not only welcomes everyone as members, but is a place where discussions about sexuality and gender take place in age-appropriate contexts. Synagogue education and youth committees should explore ways to be intentionally inviting to all children, with teachers and professional staff being trained to put the philosophy into practice.

We hope that communities will move forward and take active proactive steps to assure that our congregations are deliberately welcoming of all Jews. We hope that based on the questions in this survey, and on the materials available from Keshet, that congregations will do an in-depth analysis of their policies and procedures in this important area. We recommend kehillot go to the Keshet website: <http://www.keshetonline.org/> and review the materials available there.

Among them are two resources which are easily available, and can be found at:

<http://www.myjewishlearning.com/blog/keshet/>

The chart on page 8 is available at:

[http://www.keshetonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/7-Jewish-Values\\_8\\_5x11.pdf](http://www.keshetonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/7-Jewish-Values_8_5x11.pdf)

If LGBTQ individuals and couples as well as members of non-traditional families feel uncomfortable, kehillah leadership, both lay and professional, need to explore ways to correct the barriers which are perceived. Based on the results of the survey, it seems likely that they can find a spiritual home in Conservative Judaism.

No Jewish person, regardless of sex or gender orientation or identity, should feel out of place in our congregations for those reasons. We have much to offer; we should welcome everyone with open arms.

# Notes and Appendix

## <sup>1</sup>Introduction to survey:

In 1992 the Law Committee of the Rabbinical Assembly reviewed and accepted a series of teshuvot on issues regarding the gay and lesbian communities in our kehillot [congregations]. The last section of the consensus summary paper declares our kehillot should be welcoming to those in the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer [LGBTQ] community. "... in accordance with The Rabbinical Assembly and United Synagogue resolutions, we hereby affirm gays and lesbians are welcome in our congregations, youth groups, camps, and schools."

Much has changed since 1992 ... but how much? How well are we doing at welcoming LGBTQ Jews to our kehillot?

We are proud to be working with Keshet [<http://www.keshetonline.org>], a national grassroots organization that works for the full equality and inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) Jews in Jewish life] on this survey which is designed to answer that question.

It should take less than 10 minutes to complete our survey.

## <sup>2</sup>Core questions

1. Our institution has an all gender / unisex / non-gendered bathroom.
2. Our library has resources dealing with LGBTQ issues.
3. Our membership policy allows 2 same sex adults who are married, or consider themselves to be married, to take a family / household membership.
4. Our publications, outreach materials, website, and / or physical space include images of and information about LGBTQ issues or people.
5. Our staff has received training on LGBTQ inclusion.
6. We have a group to support LGBTQ students or members (such as a Gay-Straight Alliance or Inclusion Committee).
7. We have a written non-discrimination policy that includes gender identity and/or expression.
8. We have a written non-discrimination policy that includes sexual orientation.
9. We have staff, leaders, or board members who are out as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer.
10. We have students/members who are out as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer.
11. We offer LGBTQ specific programming, events or services (movie night, a Pride Seder, a support group).
12. We participate in advocacy for LGBTQ rights (e.g. marriage equality).
13. We reach out to the LGBTQ community via advertising in LGBTQ publications, partnering with organizations for LGBTQ-themed events, or creating LGBTQ specific marketing materials.
14. We use LGBTQ-inclusive language on our membership or application materials such as Parent 1/Parent 2 rather than Mother/Father.
15. We would rent space to a non-member\* Jewish same sex couple for wedding or other family celebration

<sup>3</sup>*The First Days of School*, Harry K. and Rosemary T. Wong, pp. 66-67

Four levels of invitation:  
Intentionally Disinviting  
Unintentionally Disinviting  
Unintentionally Inviting  
Intentionally Inviting

### כבוד

#### **Kavod: Respect**

Judaism teaches us to treat ourselves and others with respect; even the stranger is to be treated with respect. Kavod is a feeling of regard for the rights, dignity, feelings, wishes, and abilities of others. Teasing and name-calling disrespect and hurt everyone, so learn to respect people's differences.

### שלום בית

#### **Shalom Bayit: Peace in the Home**

Our community centers, synagogues, youth groups, and camps are often our second homes. Everyone needs to feel comfortable, safe, welcome, and respected at home. Don't ostracize those who seem different. Strive to settle disagreements in peaceful and respectful ways that allow all community members to maintain their dignity.

### בצלם אלהים

#### **B'Tzelem Elohim: In God's Image**

The Torah tells us that we are all created "b'Tzelem Elohim" (Bereshit 1:26), in the image of God. This is a simple and profound idea that should guide our interactions with all people. If we see each person as created in the image of God, we can see humanity and dignity in all people. True inclusion is built upon this foundation.

### כל ישראל ערבים זה בזה

#### **Kol Yisrael Arevim Zeh Baze: Communal Responsibility**

The Jewish principle that "All Israel is responsible for one another" (Shavuot 39a) means each of us must take action and inspire others to create a community in which we can all take pride.

### שמירת הלשון

#### **Sh'mirat Halashon: Guarding One's Use of Language**

The Talmud warns us that we must take care in how we use language. Talking about others behind their backs, even if what we are saying is true, is prohibited. The guidelines for "sh'mirat halashon" remind us that what we say about others affects them in ways we can never predict. Words can hurt or heal depending on how we use them.

### ואהבת לרעך כמוך

#### **V'ahavta L'Reiacha Kamocho: "Love your neighbor as yourself"**

Commenting on Leviticus 19:18, "Love your neighbor as yourself," Rabbi Hillel once stated that this was the foundational value of the Torah. It begins with loving ourselves. We must love and accept our whole selves, and in doing so create the capacity for extending that love and acceptance to others.

### אל תפרוש מן הציבור

#### **Al Tifrosh Min Hatsibur: Solidarity**

"Don't separate yourself from the community" (Pirke Avot 2:5). When you feel different from others in your community, don't isolate yourself. Find allies and supporters who you can talk to. If you know someone who is feeling isolated, reach out; be an ally and a friend.



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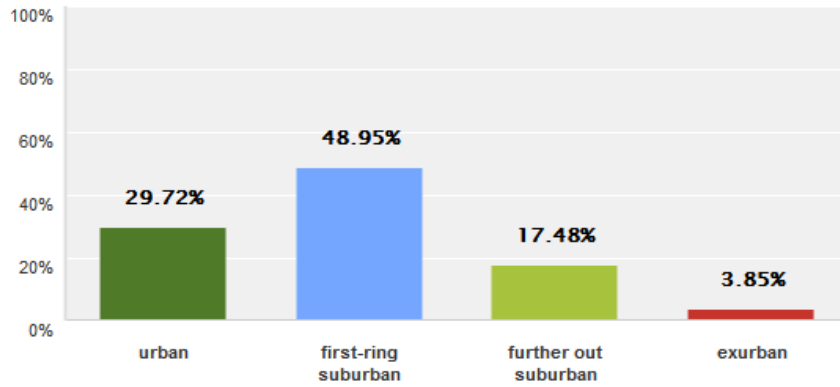
Working for the full inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender Jews in Jewish life

[www.keshetonline.org](http://www.keshetonline.org)

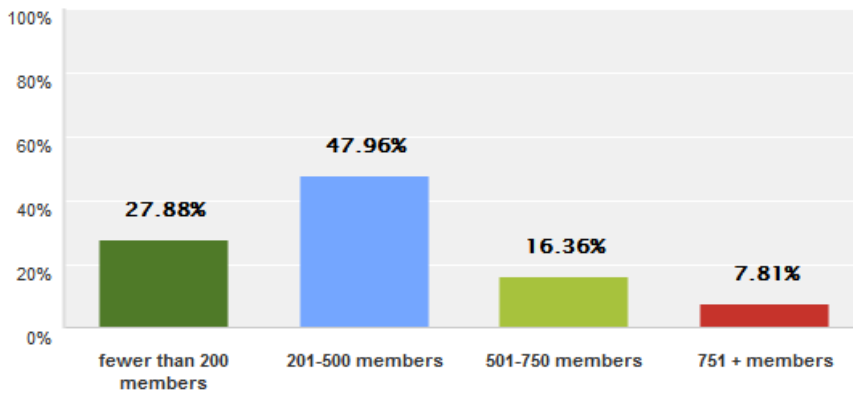


## Data Charts

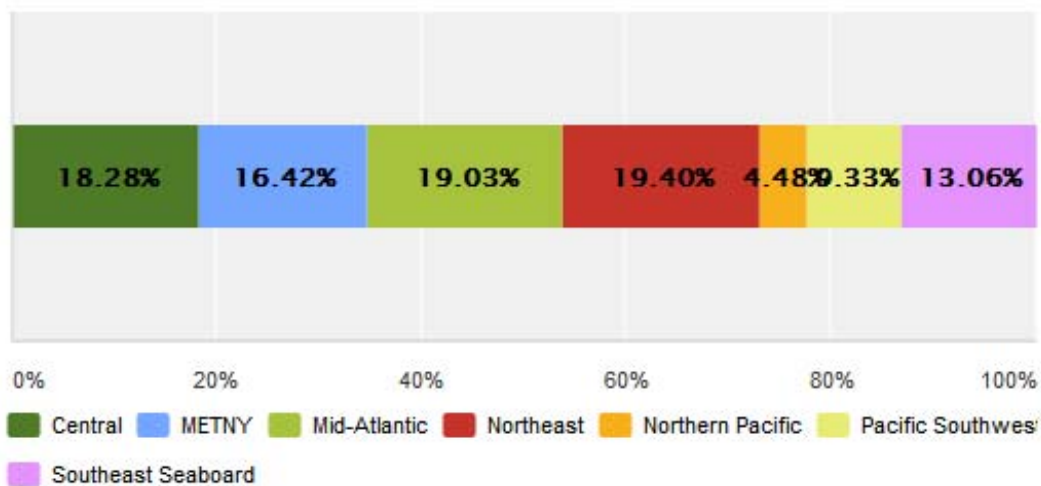
### Kehilla location



### Kehilla Size



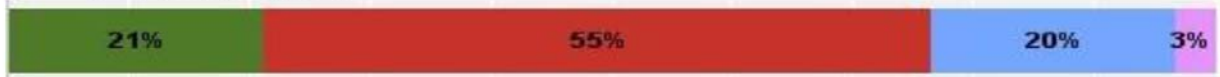
### Kehilla Region / District



## Results for core questions.

■ Yes   
 ■ No   
 ■ Not sure   
 ■ N/A

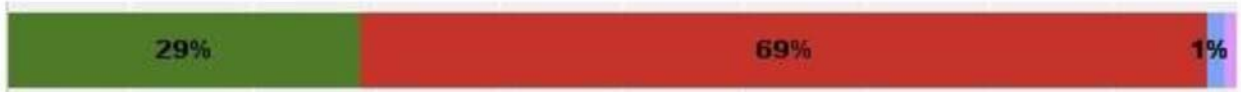
We have a written non-discrimination policy that includes gender identity and/or expression.



We have a written non-discrimination policy that includes sexual orientation.



Our institution has an all-gender/unisex/non-gendered bathroom.



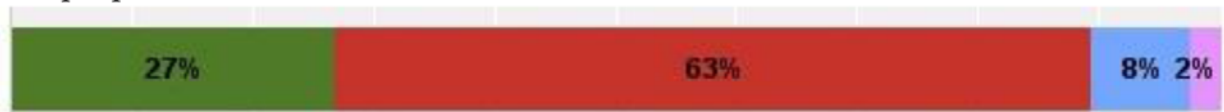
Our library has resources dealing with LGBTQ issues.



Our membership policy allows 2 same-sex adults to take a family/household membership.



Our publications...include images of and information about LGBTQ issues or people.



Our staff has received training on LGBTQ inclusion.

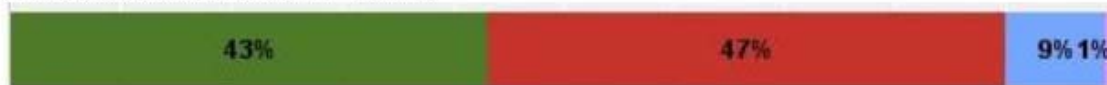


We have a group to support LGBTQ students or members.



■ Yes   
 ■ No   
 ■ Not sure   
 ■ N/A

We have staff, leaders, or board members who are out as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer.



We have students/members who are out as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer.



We offer LGBTQ-specific programming, events, or services.



We participate in advocacy for LGBTQ rights.



We reach out to the LGBTQ community via advertising.



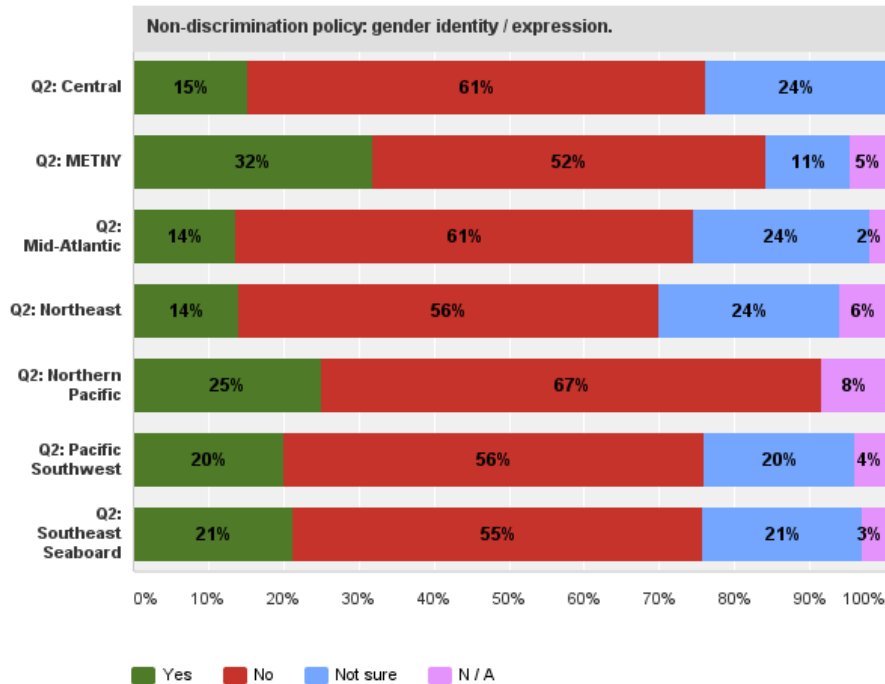
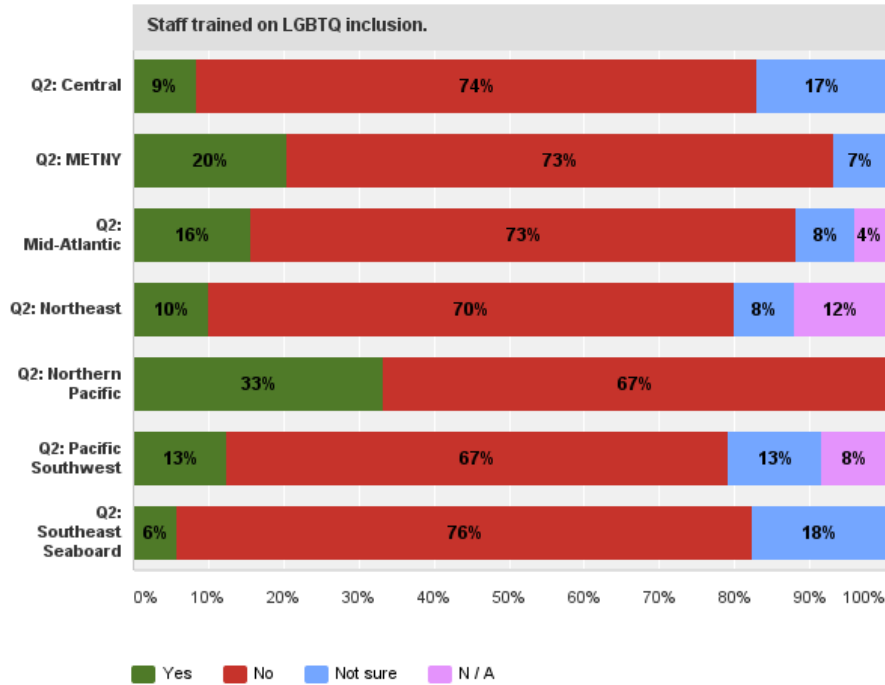
We use LGBTQ-inclusive language on our membership or application materials.

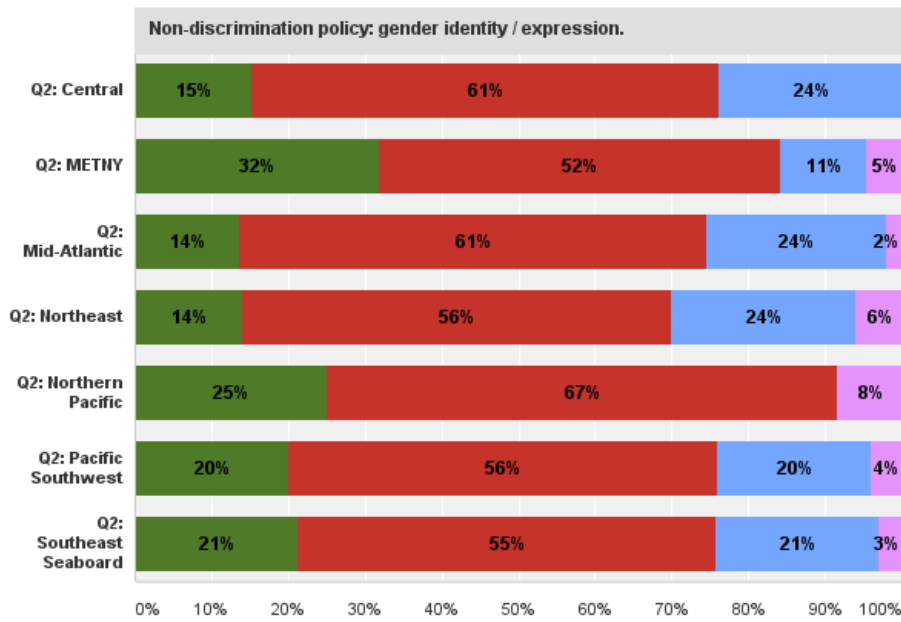


We would rent space to a non-member Jewish same-sex couple for a family celebration.

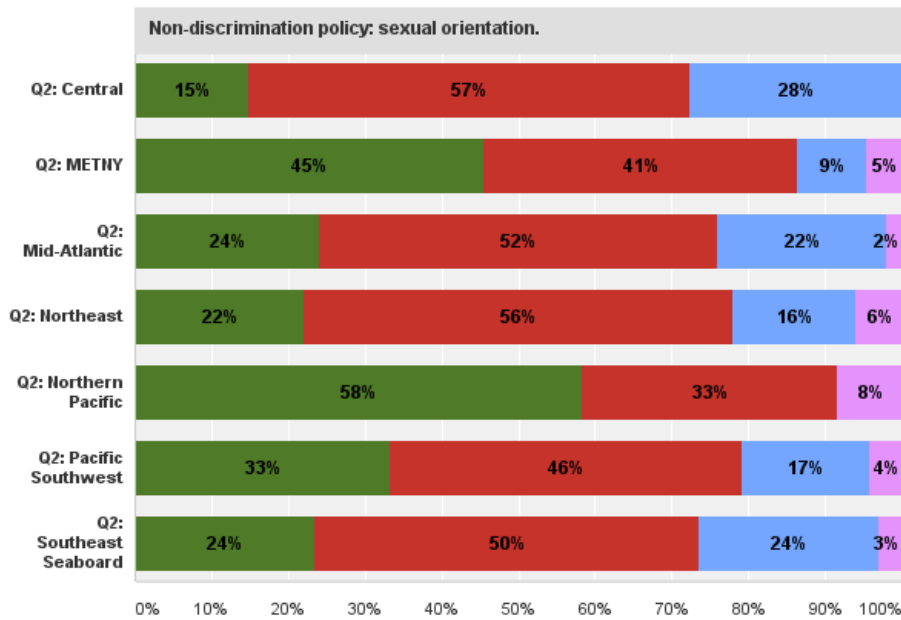


**Core questions by district.**

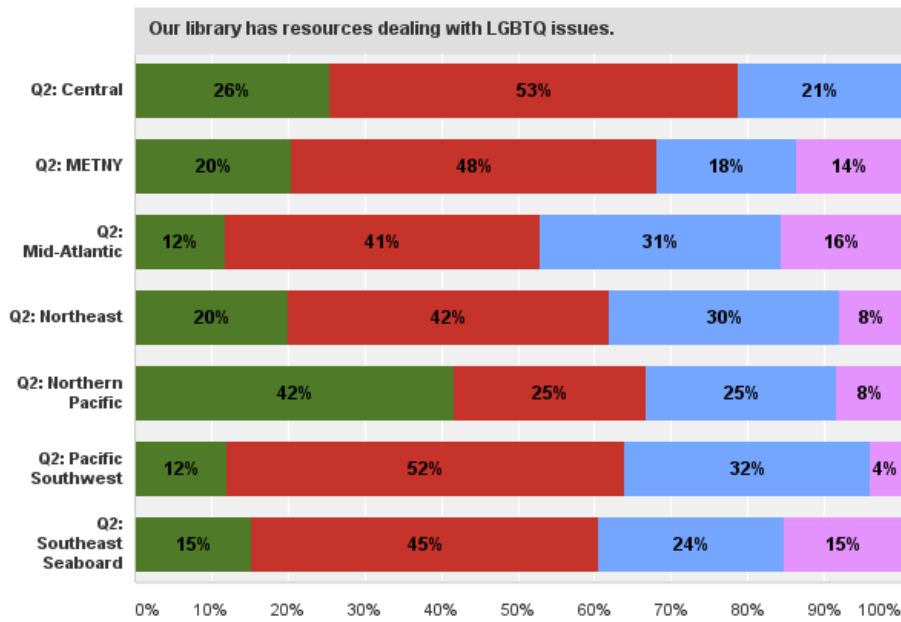




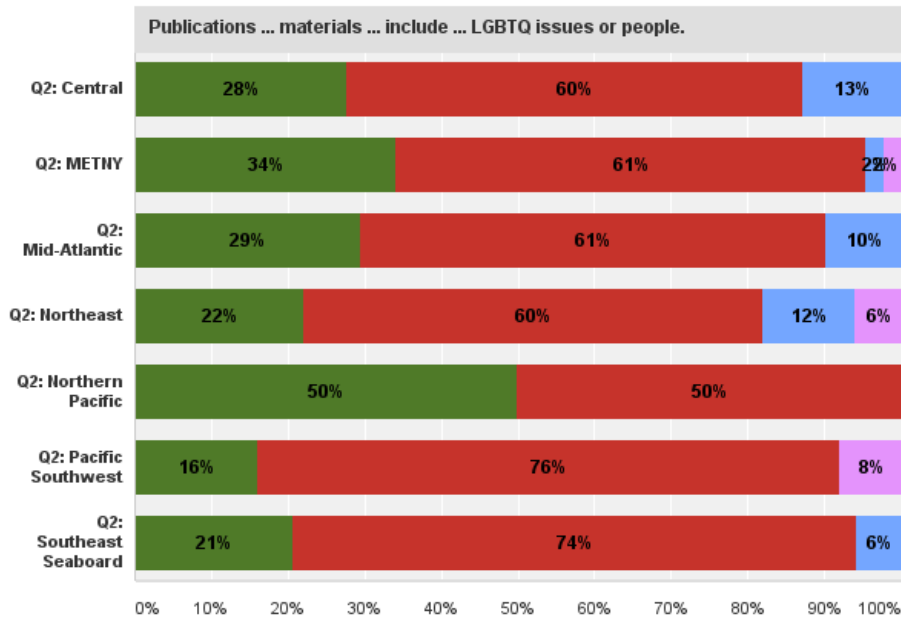
Yes No Not sure N/A



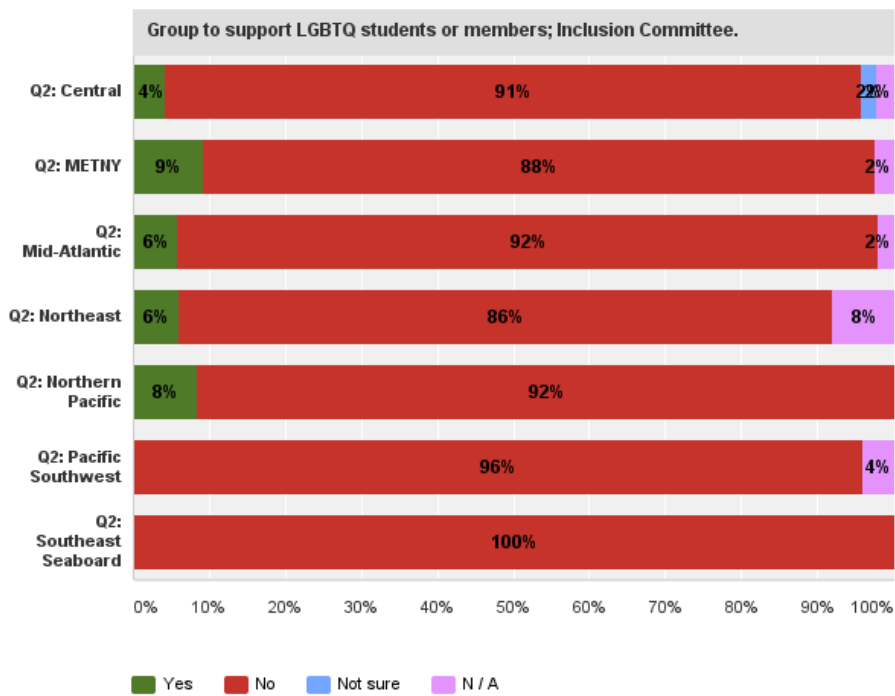
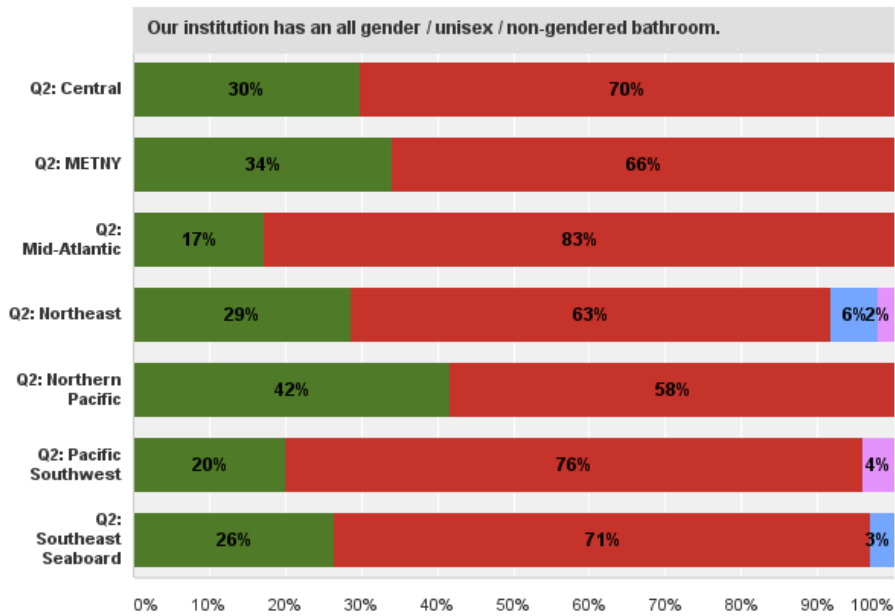
Yes No Not sure N/A

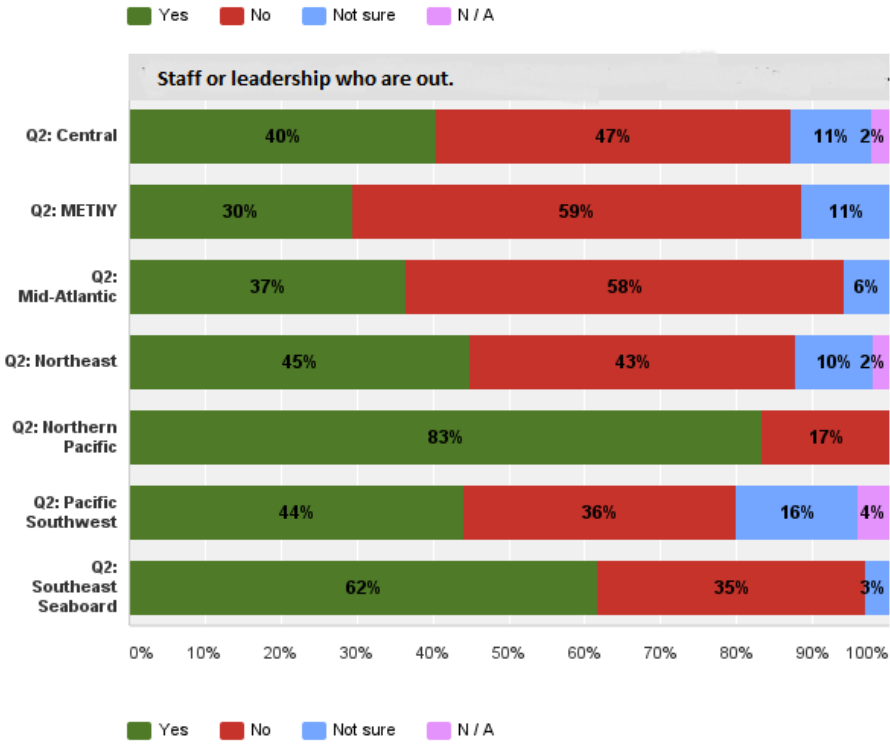
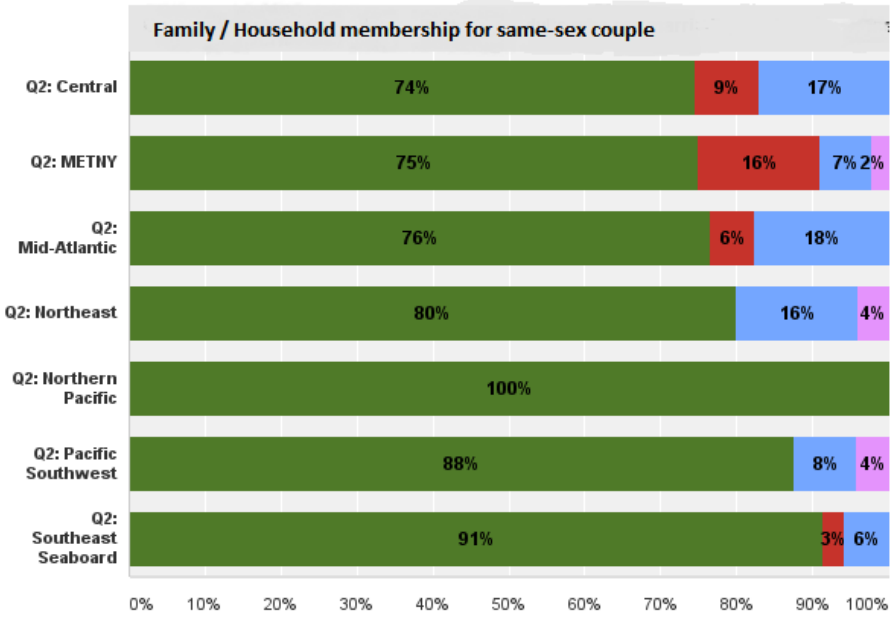


Yes No Not sure N/A

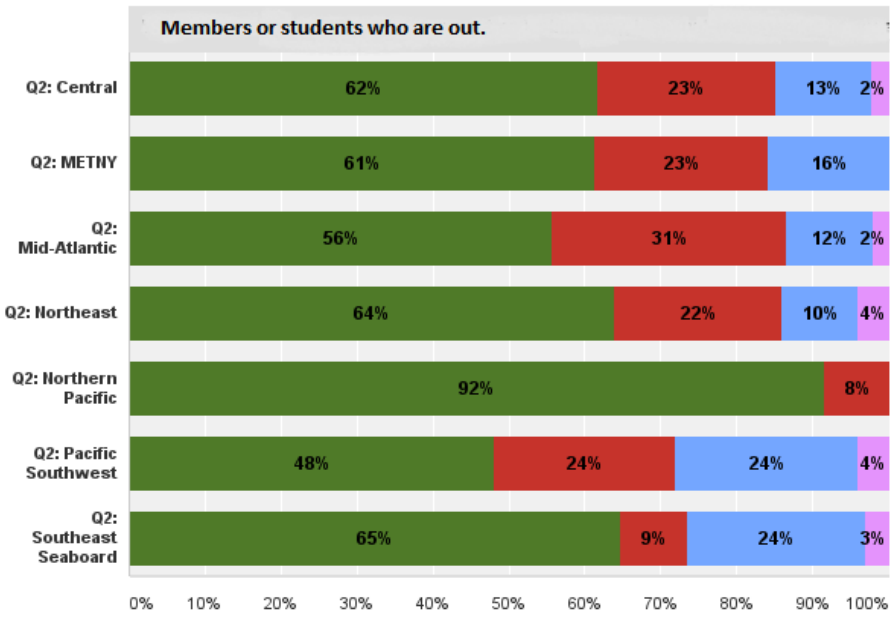


Yes No Not sure N/A

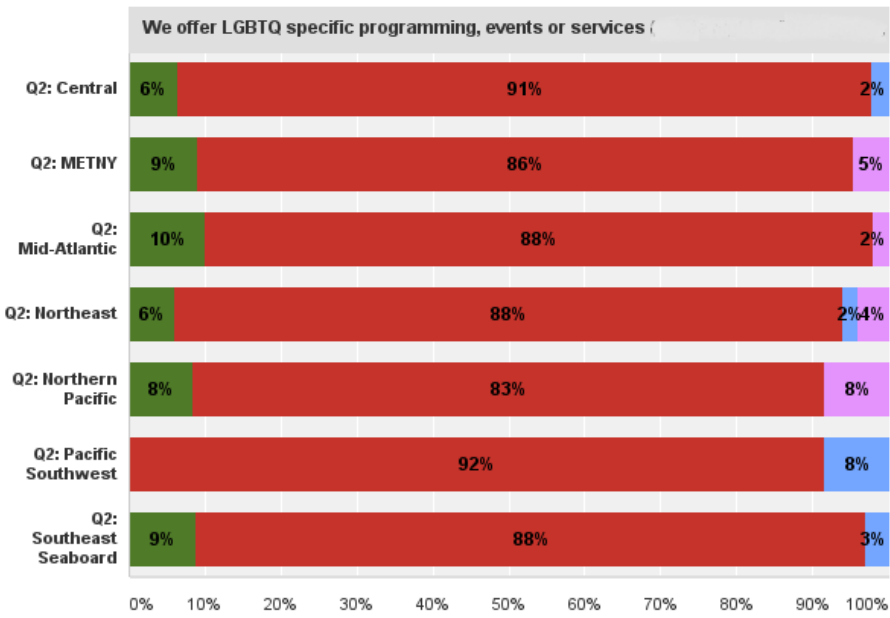




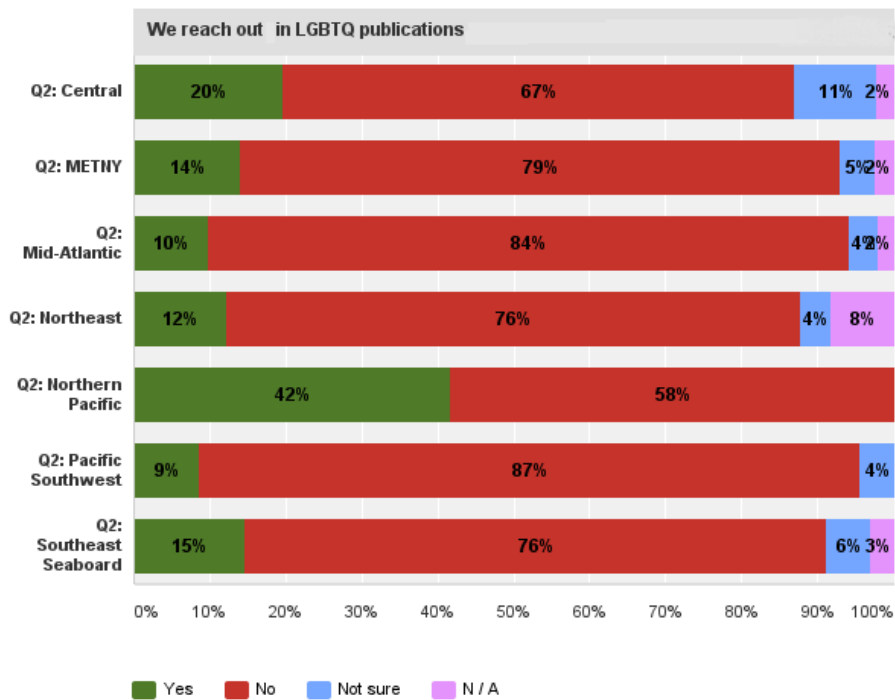
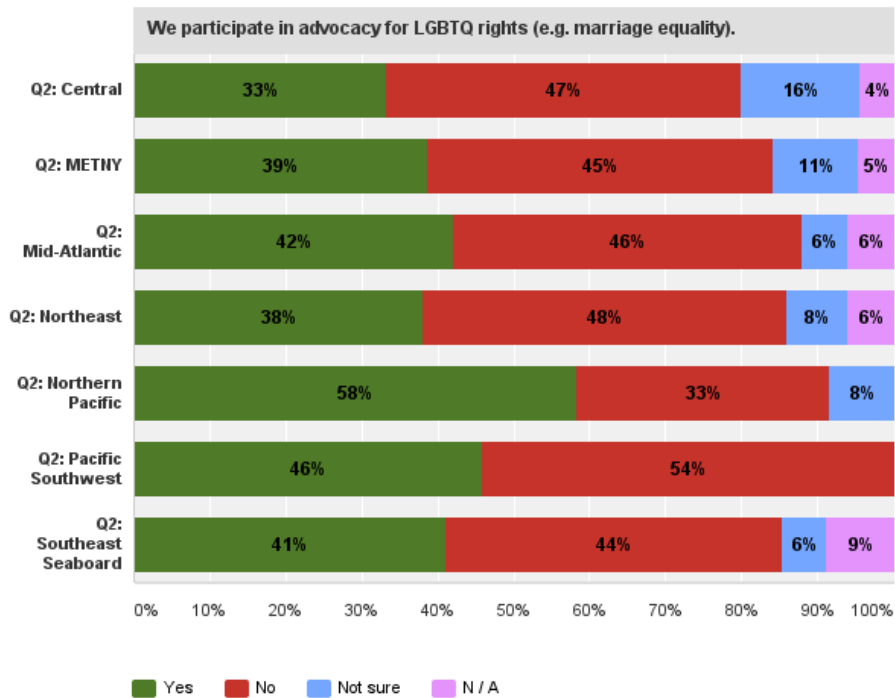


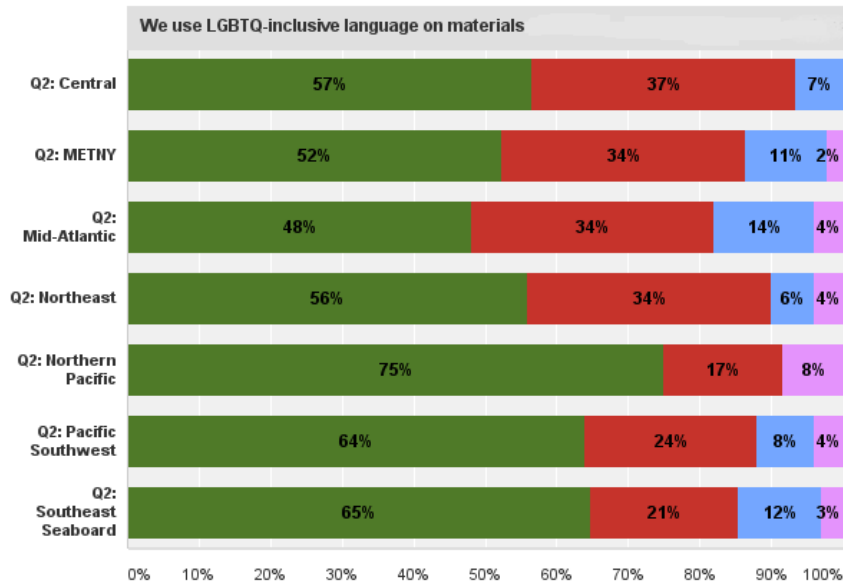


Yes No Not sure N/A

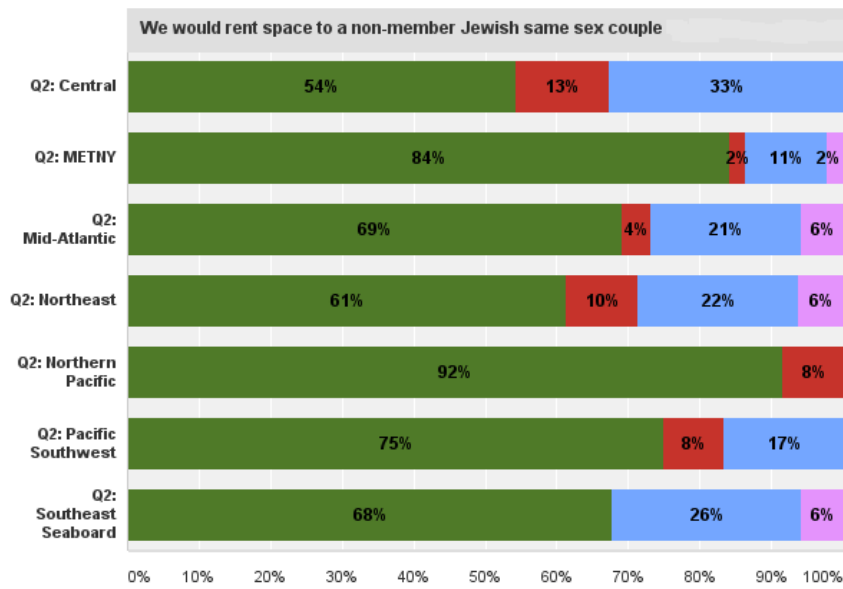


Yes No Not sure N/A





Yes No Not sure N/A



Yes No Not sure N/A

# Suggestions for LGBT Outreach at Kehilla Level

**Kenneth Altman**

*Founder LGBT Chavurah/Outreach Program of  
Congregation Beth Sholom, San Francisco, California*

1. Establish buy-in from Board, clergy and lay leadership. Kick-off event should have those people present to indicate their support for the program.
2. Establish plans to get the word out! The program requires planned PR, not simply relying on word-of-mouth via marketing, media outreach, and good contact lists for invites.
3. Define your mission with a written Mission Statement, e.g. – “The mission of the LGBT Chavurah/Outreach Program of Congregation Beth Sholom (CBS) is to socialize, to discuss issues related to being lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender in the context of the Conservative Movement, to increase visibility and awareness of LGBT Jews in our community, and to make sure that LGBT Jews who want to join a Conservative congregation know that they have a place to go.”
4. Meet regularly, at least one event each month – and in the interest of consistency and building up a good rhythm don’t cancel unless absolutely necessary. For example, at Congregation Beth Sholom we held 4<sup>th</sup> Friday dinner monthly for the first 5 years that we were in operation. Those dinners were held regardless of how many people RSVPd. We sometimes held dinners with just 2 or 3 people in attendance.

Add a further incentive to attend! About a year or two into the monthly dinner at Beth Sholom, we scheduled a speaker to join us for dinner. The criteria were broad, e.g. Jewish, gay, politician, local business person, etc. Important – always feed them first! Serve dinner for at least 20 or 30 minutes before you invite your speaker to address attendees.

5. Partner with other programs in the congregation to increase visibility and give support for their programming. For example, we partnered with CBS’s Jewish Life Inmate Prison Outreach Project and made regular visits to Folsom State Prison to meet and study with Jewish inmates serving life sentences. We also participated in our Chicken Soupers program, which cooks and delivers kosher meals to San Francisco Jews living with disabilities, chronic illnesses, etc.
6. Plan at least 4 events per year, and partner with other agencies as appropriate
  - a. Participate in Pride Parade and invite other Conservative congregations to join you.
  - b. Jewish Film Festival
  - c. Speakers of interest
  - d. Saturday night Havdalah event, in members’ homes, 2 or 3 times per year
7. Actively welcome the entire synagogue community. Make sure people know that *everyone* is welcome to all events. While the outreach group has a focus, its programs are open to all, as are all events at the synagogue.