

Excerpts from Concept and Strategy document



THE AMERICAN LGBTQ+ MUSEUM

Executive Summary

The Motivation

LGBTQ+ people have a long and storied history in New York City and beyond, long predating the Stonewall Riots. Yet because of shame, stigma, and prejudice, the unique contributions of LGBTQ+ history have been ignored or erased.

Other groups that have overcome significant obstacles to become a part of the fabric of American society have erected museums and monuments to honor their history, educate future generations, and protect their hard-won progress. To date—despite progress on a range of LGBTQ+ issues—there is no major LGBTQ+ cultural destination in the United States. Furthermore, there remains a striking absence of LGBTQ+ representation in major museums, because of the exclusion of certain voices or through suppression of LGBTQ+ history, context, or subtext.

A new museum dedicated to preserving, researching, and sharing LGBTQ+ history and culture will allow us to tell our evolving histories in our own voices. Currently, there are more than 11 million Americans that identify as LGBTQ+. Our community is growing more rapidly than ever before, as younger generations are more likely to identify with traditional LGBTQ+, emergent, and adjacent identities.

The Research

The concept and strategy for the Museum are based on rigorous market analysis and engagement of over 3,200 LGBTQ+ community members. A team of seasoned museum professionals conducted qualitative and quantitative research locally, regionally, and nationally to define the Museum's purpose, identity, market, and potential partners. Data was gathered through a national survey, focus groups in all five New York City boroughs including in English, Spanish, and Russian, a market analysis, and in-depth engagements with LGBTQ+ thought leaders across the country. Four volumes of research are available for review.

Research consistently revealed urgency, support, and excitement for the Museum provided that it lives by its stated values of justice, intersectionality, honesty and transparency, fearlessness, collaboration, and joy.

Who is telling our stories?

Where do we document the work of our elders who fought for the rights we experience today?

How do we illuminate our incredible contributions to American history?

How do we safeguard against losing our multifaceted, intertwined histories and the artifacts that will keep them alive forever?

How do we draw upon the past to plan for the future?

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The Institution

Our mission is to preserve, investigate, and celebrate the dynamic histories and cultures of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people as well as those of the emergent and adjacent identities among our communities. The Museum plan is informed by the American Alliance of Museums' *Characteristics of Excellence*, and a balanced strategic approach to ensure mission delivery and long-term sustainability.

Audience: We project 200,000–250,000 visitors per year, drawn primarily from the 7.3 million LGBTQ+ people who live in or visit the New York metro area. Robust digital resources will serve remote audiences.

Collections: We will not be a collecting museum. We will only collect to support our core exhibition, and plan to direct additional potential collections to the existing network of museums, archives, and libraries that collect LGBTQ+ materials. Beyond this, we will borrow collections for rotating exhibitions and may, in some instances, serve as a repository for at-risk artifacts and archives before finding them a home.

Exhibitions and Programs: Visitors will engage with a range of evolving topics through core content and rotating exhibitions, and a “response gallery” for exploring current events and sharing personal stories. Education and public programs will include school tours, youth programs, cultural events, performances, and community conversations.

Partnership with New-York Historical Society: Our first home will be on the fourth floor of the newly expanded N-YHS set to open in 2026.

How will this museum be different?

Vibrant, colorful and welcoming environment

Fearless dialogic engagement with our community

Bold intersectional content and programs that deliver on **diversity, equity, access and inclusion**

Responsive curatorial practices that capture evolving narratives and embrace shared agency

Immersive signature experiences that bring history to life

Alliances with institutional and community partners to share collections, conduct research, produce programs, and share space

This would be an important place for not just LGBTQ Americans, but for those all around the globe waiting for our history to be recorded and shared.

- New York-Based Survey Respondent

As LGBTQ histories remain largely untold, a commitment to meaningful and forward-thinking conceptions of our community and its histories is an exciting promise for this museum.

- Expert Panelist

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The Impact

By bringing its mission and values to life through scholarship and programming, the American LGBTQ+ Museum will leave an indelible mark on the world.

Expand understanding of LGBTQ+ history and culture

- Engage over 200,000 Museum visitors with objects and stories that represent the breadth, depth, and diversity of LGBTQ+ people, as well as the emergent and adjacent identities among our communities
- Offer learning opportunities for over 20,000 school children on-site using primary source materials
- Highlight the stories of people of color, transgender individuals, people living with disabilities, and other underrepresented LGBTQ+ communities
- Document and make available LGBTQ+ stories to younger generations
- Create avenues for non-LGBTQ+ people to learn about our history

Preserve LGBTQ+ stories and contribute to preservation efforts to protect LGBTQ+ materials that are at risk of being lost

Collaborate to advance the field, ensuring that LGBTQ+ history is told by LGBTQ+ institutions

Just reading what has been proposed here is exciting. To document LGBTQ+ people, our struggle, our perseverance is so tremendously important. I would be elated to visit, to donate, and to know that our stories will live on.

- New York-Based Survey Respondent

As an older member of the LGBTQ Community and an long-term survivor of HIV/AIDS, I feel it is important for the younger members of our community to have a source/space that accurately presents and preserves our history, not only for the past 50 years but throughout history.

- New York-Based Survey Respondent

I don't feel very connected with the LGBTQ community which feels really sad. I would love to go with my wife and feel like I'm represented and also feel safe and welcomed just as I am, without having to apologize or change to fit in..

- National Survey Respondent

Why a Museum?

The Museum is imperative because we are reaching the point where soon the elders won't be here. It's scary and a little emotional to think about it. There will be no way to capture their work if we don't have a museum.

- Interviewee

As a trans woman with a young child, my wife and I are always looking for ways that our family can feel seen. My child is beginning to understand the way her family is different, and seeing that we are not alone is so important.

- New York Survey Respondent

*Thrilled there is a concept for a place that conveys **LGBT** history in American history.*

- Interviewee

This museum would be filling an urgent need for our community and anyone interested in queer history.

- New York Survey Respondent

As a gay man of color, I feel that visiting this museum is just as important as visiting the museums in D.C. They all represent a part of my intersectionality.

- National Survey Respondent

The American LGBTQ+ Museum will be a new institution of local, regional, national, and global significance. We are dedicated to advancing understanding and scholarship of the history and culture of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people, as well as emergent and adjacent identities.

Community engagement and research have confirmed that a museum is urgently needed to:

- **Illuminate queer history** as integral to human history
- **Preserve personal stories, tangible, and intangible heritage** that are at risk and being lost every day
- Support a new generation of activists to **advance social change**
- **Learn together with our communities** about the evolving, complex, and sometimes internally contentious narratives of LGBTQ+ history
- **Provide a physical space** for LGBTQ+ people that fosters individual dignity and unifies across generations and differences



Mission

The American LGBTQ+ Museum preserves, investigates, and celebrates the dynamic histories and cultures of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people, as well as the emergent and adjacent identities among our communities. Using exhibitions and programs, we seek to advance LGBTQ+ equality through the lens of social justice movements, including but not limited to race, gender, class, immigration, and disability.

Vision

We envision a world in which all people work toward and experience the joy of liberation.

Values

Justice	We are committed to a world wherein power is equitably shared among all people, including LGBTQ+ people.
Intersectionality	We are mindful of the multi-layered identities of LGBTQ+ people and communities, and we are committed to diversity and inclusivity in all aspects of our work.
Honesty and Transparency	We share our decisions and processes, and we welcome critique and feedback.
Fearlessness	We take risks and advocate for the needs of all LGBTQ+ communities, including addressing areas of tension and difference among us.
Collaboration	We are of the community. We work through shared authority and partnership with those who have come before us and those who work alongside us.
Joy	We take pride in the victories and resilience of our communities, and we draw inspiration from that energy to continue in our pursuit of liberation.

Grounded in Research and Community Engagement

This concept for the Museum is based on a year-long study that engaged over 3,200 LGBTQ+ people nationwide—including historians, academics, activists, social service providers, students, museum professionals, archivists, writers, and the general public across as many demographic intersections as possible.

Engaged 3,200 members of the LGBTQ+ community

- 144 Participants in 13 focus groups in all five New York City boroughs, including groups in English, Spanish, and Russian
- 178 Survey of thought leaders shaping the future of LGBTQ+ research, culture, services, policy, and media
- 18 Written recommendations and critiques from historians and academics
- 2,822 Survey of the LGBTQ+ general population (two 15 —minute surveys – residents of the New York region and nationwide)
- 33 Interviews with thought leaders and market experts
- 20 Survey of the Museum’s board members

The research and engagement process yielded four volumes of data and analysis that have firmly grounded our vision. Volume 1: Key Findings from Stakeholder Engagement, Volume 2: Key Findings from National Survey of LGBTQ+ Population, Volume 3: Market Analysis, Volume 4: Space Program and Capital Cost Estimates.

What We Learned

The American LGBTQ+ Museum will be able to do something no other institution can: share the rich history of our communities with millions of LGBTQ+ residents and tourists in New York City.

Stakeholder feedback and research revealed:

- **Urgency and support for establishing a new museum** of LGBTQ+ museum of history and culture.
- **High demand for LGBTQ+ programming and education.**
- **Enthusiasm that New York City is the right place** for the museum.
- **Growing interest in LGBTQ+ content**, signaled by Stonewall 50, political climate, rising generations learning LGBTQ+ history, and so much more.
- **The Museum can and should be like no other history museum:** vibrant, colorful, welcoming, immersive, exploratory; and offering programming that fills current gaps in research and education.
- **Delivering on Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion (DEAI) will determine long-term success or failure.** The Museum must be intersectional and collaborative, flattening hierarchies by engaging community members and institutional partners at all levels of planning and implementation.

Stewarding our community's evolving histories comes with a complex set of opportunities and responsibilities.

Research led to the following recommendations:

- **The Museum should contribute to the preservation of materials at risk**, complementing the work presently being done in archives and libraries.
- **Build trust with all LGBTQ+ communities**, proving that they can entrust their stories and objects to the Museum without fear of erasure or misrepresentation.
- **Be bold and embrace the complex conflicted nature of LGBTQ+ life** and tell stories that reflect these realities.
- **Curatorial practices and programming must be flexible, adaptable, and responsive** to accurately represent evolving and intersectional narratives.
- **Seek partnerships and collaborations** with existing institutions.

Risk taking is something that we desperately need in the museum world.

- Expert Panelist

Who is the Museum for?

We project 200,000 - 250,000 on-site visitors per year.

The Museum will be a place where visitors can see themselves as part of history. Our primary audience will be LGBTQ+ people: New Yorkers and visitors, adults and youth. This demographic includes at least 7.3 million people, and is young, growing, and likely undercounted. These audiences will be repeat visitors, members, and program participants.

Secondary market segments will be family members, allies, and special-interest users such as educators, media-makers, and policy advocates.

Special programming will engage additional visitor segments through digital initiatives, partnerships, group visits, outreach and off-site programming, and traveling exhibitions. These audiences include K–12 schools (3.2M students in New York City metro area) and LGBTQ+ people nationwide (11.3M).

Of course I would like to visit a museum that relates to my own life.

- New York-Based Survey Respondent

My friends are gay or straight allies, and we wouldn't pass up a chance to visit this museum.

- National Survey Respondent

Because I'm 71 years of age, and I've waited a long time in anticipation for something of that kind the thought is exciting.

- New York-Based Survey Respondent

In Our Own Words...

The aftermath of marriage equality was a zeitgeist moment in our community that sparked more and more efforts to remember, record, and celebrate the history of our movement and our lives.

We've seen new AIDS memorials, the expansion of LGBTQ+ archives and libraries, and a successful 2016 campaign to create the Stonewall National Monument, the nation's first dedicated to telling the story of LGBTQ+ Americans.

As we look ahead to the battles that remain, we also need to look back and give rising generations the LGBTQ+ history they tell us they don't know and are eager to learn.

- Richard Burns, Chair, The American LGBTQ+ Museum

The Museum should be a place for history, community and political activism. It should give the LGBT community a sense of our remarkable journey and legacy. It should make us feel like we inherit an incredible story and that we stand on the shoulders of remarkable people and ancestors. It should preserve our history, and make us proud of who we were, what we are, and what we can become.

- Board Member

This Museum should change the world by making an experience that gives a complex, polyvocal, intersectional history of the LGBTQ+ movement and makes all of that accessible to the broader public. ... Its greatest impact should be turning out potential activists: people willing to take action to further the movement's aims.

- Board Member

Looking Ahead

The American LGBTQ+ Museum has launched public programming partnerships in New York City and around the country.

In the coming years, pilot programming will respond to stakeholder feedback and opportunities to build partnerships. We will explore:

- Conversations, including about the composition of the Museum itself
- Multidisciplinary speaker series and performances
- Temporary exhibits that will explore the Museum's content
- Educational programming that supports teaching LGBTQ+ history as part of an inclusive curriculum
- Collaborations with existing archives and museums
- Festivals, balls, and celebrations that center joy and wellbeing.

Got emotional just reading about the proposal.

- New York-Based Survey Respondent

This is a wonderful and worthy project—long over-due.

- Expert Panelist





Crowbar East Village, NYC. 1994
Image courtesy Luis Carle