What’s Next?
Building Strong LGBTQ Organizations Beyond the Marriage Milestone

By Fran Hutchins, Director of Organizational Development & Training
ABOUT EQUALITY FEDERATION INSTITUTE

Equality Federation Institute is the strategic partner and movement builder to state-based organizations that are working on the ground to advance policies that improve the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people. Since 1997, we have worked throughout the country — strengthening state-based LGBT organizations, building the leaders of today and tomorrow, and making critical progress on the issues that matter most. The greatest opportunities for policy wins are in the states, where the work is hard but the impact is great. With our support, statewide LGBT advocacy organizations are building a strong movement for equality in the communities we call home.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the next few years, we have the real possibility of winning the freedom to marry for same-sex couples in every state in the country. Few thought we would reach this moment so quickly, but it’s almost here. As it approaches, our movement is wrestling with a key question: What’s next?

Equality Federation—the strategic partner to state-based organizations advancing equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) people—has worked on the ground in nearly all of the states that have won marriage so far. And in each state where we’ve worked, we’ve learned an important lesson: achieving marriage does not end discrimination or injustice against LGBTQ people. Wedding bells do not signal that our work is finished.

As important a milestone as it is, marriage equality will not keep LGBTQ young people in their homes and loved by their families. It will not keep them in school and out of the criminal justice system. It will not ensure transgender people access to accurate identity documents or critical health care services. It will not make our streets and our communities safe and free from violence. It will not make our military, our prisons, or our immigration system inclusive and just.

And yet marriage has been an important framing issue for our movement for the past decade. Entire organizations and campaigns have been created to address this critical issue. Millions of dollars from millions of donors have been poured into winning. As a movement, we’ve learned how to strategize, organize, and win.

Now, we must take what we can from that work and keep going. In our experience on the ground, we have come to understand marriage as just one milestone on a much longer journey to full LGBTQ liberation. And although marriage is not the endpoint of our work, it is a milestone that provides the opportunity and the necessity for reflection, assessment, and planning.

What does it look like to do LGBTQ advocacy work beyond the marriage milestone?

In short, post-marriage work is about achieving lived equality. It’s about making sure that the lives of all of our community members are not only framed by legal equality but also rooted in safety and opportunity. It’s about working at the intersections of the oppression that separates us from the freedom we so long to win. It’s about addressing the needs and advancement of the most vulnerable among us, measuring our success in the lived experiences of our people.

In this report, we consider what’s next for states that have secured the freedom to marry — states that had been working for years to win, that grew and expanded in order to get the work done, that achieved victory and realized they had completed all or most of their initial policy goals. In the report, we ask and answer: How can organizations make the shift to focusing on lived equality?
Over the past year, Equality Federation has been working with these states that are beyond the marriage milestone. We've been collaborating with organizations like EqualityMaine, Garden State Equality, OutFront Minnesota, Equality Maryland, Equality Hawaii, and Equality New Mexico as they engaged in a process to determine their organizations’ futures and the futures of the movement in their states.

In addition to partnering with these organizations, we interviewed key movement leaders who were deeply engaged in state work beyond the marriage milestone or who had been involved in charting the post-marriage future.

Through these partnerships and conversations, we came to deeply understand the challenges facing states that have achieved the marriage milestone:

- State leaders don’t have a single, tested model for what post-marriage work looks like. So far, most states that have achieved marriage have also secured nondiscrimination protections, safe schools policies, and beyond. What work remains to be done, and how do we get it done, after we’ve achieved marriage?
- No coordinated funding effort has emerged to support organizations working beyond the marriage milestone. Like state leaders, funders are still wrestling with the question of “what’s next?” in states that have secured a host of legal protections for LGBTQ people.
- Major donor and grassroots funding is more difficult without a galvanizing issue like marriage. How do we engage individual donors at every level in supporting the work that remains to be done after marriage?
- State organizations must learn new ways to partner and collaborate as post-marriage work is increasingly understood as intersectional in nature, responding to the needs of those who live at the intersections of class, race, immigration status, and beyond.

Given everything we’ve learned over the past year about the work and the future of organizations beyond the marriage milestone, we know one thing to be true: now is the time.

Now is the moment for statewide LGBTQ advocacy groups to plan for their work beyond marriage. From groups that are on the brink of winning to groups that will only achieve marriage as part of a federal mandate, our movement organizations must begin to grapple with big questions, have intentional conversations, both internal and external, and begin communicating with constituents about what’s next.

We recommend that organizations undertake a robust planning process that involves the board, staff, and community. We recommend that each organization carefully consider the landscape — political, social, cultural — in which they operate and work to develop and message an organizational identity that responds to everything that’s at stake. We recommend that organizations begin to adapt now for a new political reality and an uncertain funding future.
At Equality Federation, we believe that LGBTQ political power can be effectively developed, held, and mobilized at a statewide level. We believe that healthy LGBTQ advocacy groups in each state make for a strong nationwide movement. We believe a strong state-based and national movement is critical to winning lasting equality — including but not limited to marriage.

If we want a strong movement that ensures lasting equality, we need strong LGBTQ organizations that keep working and thriving after winning marriage. Let’s use this historic moment as an opportunity to refocus the discussion on lived equality and true freedom for everyone in our community.
INTRODUCTION

The polls are clear and consistent: public support for same-sex marriage is at an all-time high, with majority support even in the states that have not yet won marriage. More quickly than we ever believed, it’s really becoming a question of “when?” and not “if” the freedom to marry will be afforded to all committed couples in every corner of the country. At the time of this writing, nineteen states and the District of Columbia have extended marriage to same-sex couples, with several more states on the cusp of winning. The recent momentum in marriage policy wins has sparked significant conversation in our movement about which state will be next.

“What’s next?” is an exciting question to ask, but the more important question for our movement is, “What’s next?”

At Equality Federation, the strategic partner to LGBTQ advocacy organizations, we believe that winning marriage shouldn’t represent the end of the LGBTQ movement. As such, we are interested in what it takes to keep strong movement organizations going and thriving after reaching such a major milestone as marriage.

With so many states having recently reached the marriage milestone — and others soon to do so — state leaders, national groups, funders, and supporters must address the question, “What’s next?” sooner rather than later if we are to work together to build a sustainable LGBTQ movement that continues to thrive and make progress long after a major victory like marriage equality is achieved.

Early clues as to how to answer the question of what’s next can be found on the ground where the work began, among the first states to find themselves in the position of having accomplished nearly everything on their legislative agendas, including marriage. In this report, we look at states on the other side of the marriage milestone and begin to understand what steps are necessary to continue work to win full equality, what challenges are most significant, and what success might look like.

Equality Federation has an interest in the organizational health of statewide equality organizations (most of which we count as our members) because we believe that LGBTQ political power can be effectively developed, held, and mobilized at a statewide level, in the communities we call home. We believe that healthy LGBTQ advocacy groups in each state make for a strong nationwide movement. We believe a strong state-based and national movement is critical to winning lasting equality — including but not limited to marriage. We believe that, in many cases, statewide LGBTQ advocacy organizations have more work to do, even after winning marriage.

Although not every state equality group will continue operations once the marriage milestone has been reached, we believe that each organization that has achieved marriage equality should engage in a deliberate, thoughtful process to plan for the future. Thus, we have an interest, along with many state-based and national movement leaders, in answering several critical questions:
What’s Next?

- What kind of process is appropriate to decide the future?
- What is the role of a state-based LGBTQ advocacy organization after achieving marriage?
- What does post-marriage work look like? How do organizations need to change and adapt to this new political environment?
- Can state equality groups remain viable after winning marriage? Who funds this new work?

This report explores each question in turn, looking at states on the other side of the marriage milestone to begin to understand what steps are necessary to continue work to win full equality, even in the face of significant challenges and unclear models of success. After considering the approaches taken in different states, we offer up recommendations to ensure that our movement organizations are able to thrive in the post-marriage world.

In order to begin answering these questions, this report details the experiences of two Federation member groups — MassEquality and EqualityMaine — as they navigated this changing landscape. We also include examples from other state organizations with which we have worked in the past year (2013), including groups in Minnesota, New Mexico, Hawaii, Maryland, and New Jersey. In order to assist groups that are considering ceasing operations, this paper also explores the circumstances and decisions of Love Makes a Family, the Connecticut organization that strategically closed its doors after winning marriage equality.

Leaders and staff from all of these organizations were generous with their time and allowed the Federation to conduct in-depth interviews, do archival document review, and, in some cases, participate in the post-marriage planning process.

In addition to engaging in this research, Equality Federation has been partnering with organizations that have won marriage — on both an individual and cohort basis. We are providing tailored support to our members who have achieved the marriage milestone, from strategic planning to executive transition management. We are hosting peer learning opportunities to allow for sharing of best practices and collaborative innovation. And we are creating a national conversation about our movement beyond the marriage milestone, ensuring that “What’s next?” is a question that’s wrestled with strategically and courageously.

State-based organizations working beyond the marriage milestone are wrestling with many key questions:

1. What kind of process is appropriate to decide the future?
2. What is the role of a state-based LGBTQ advocacy organization after achieving marriage?
3. What does post-marriage work look like? How do organizations need to change and adapt to this new political environment?
4. Can state equality groups remain viable after winning marriage? Who funds this new work?
WHAT KIND OF PROCESS IS APPROPRIATE TO DECIDE THE FUTURE?

Often after winning marriage, state-based organizations celebrate the completion of a legislative agenda that had been planned out several years earlier. As the celebrations come to a close, state leaders often realize that their strategic plans offer little to no clarity on what’s next for their work now that marriage has been won. While most organizations understand the need to do some strategic planning after securing marriage, no consensus exists as to what kind of planning process is appropriate to decide an uncharted future.

We can learn what works from groups like MassEquality, EqualityMaine, Outfront Minnesota, and Project 515. Each of these groups made a conscious decision and an investment of time and resources to undergo a formal strategic planning process. These groups engaged the assistance of outside facilitators, either paid consultants, Equality Federation staff, or both. Groups did not expect to create a strategic plan in one weekend, but instead let the process roll out over the course of several months. They set aside time both for multi-day off-site meetings and for a robust stakeholder process that solicited feedback from community members, movement leaders, and allies.

Why is this kind of robust strategic planning so necessary?

The first cohort of groups to win marriage are pioneers. Few models exist to guide the post-marriage movement. But one thing is clear: the passage of marriage equality provides an opportunity, often a necessary one, for LGBTQ organizations to shift the frame of their work. By frame, we mean the guiding tenets of an organization: a theory of change, a mission, and a vision. For many years, the majority of statewide LGBTQ organizations have worked within an equal rights frame that puts the marriage agenda front and center, along with other broad-based legislative measures, such as nondiscrimination and safe schools. With marriage (and, more often than not, with safe schools and nondiscrimination) accomplished, a new way to think of the work, one that goes beyond (or redefines) basic equality of rights, is needed. As shown by the work of MassEquality, EqualityMaine, and Outfront Minnesota, a strategic planning process that includes staff, board, and stakeholders can help with the development of such a frame. This kind of planning allows the leadership of an organization to reflect on the theory of change, the vision, and the mission for the organization going forward.

A planning process like this allows the individuals that make up the leadership of the organization to reflect on their own investment and place in the organization. Board and staff transitions during the planning process are to be expected. In many cases (though not all), leaders realize that although
the work is not done, their part of it is. Completing a strategic plan makes it much easier to bring in new leadership who understand and buy into the new direction of the organization and who have the skills and abilities to match what’s needed in the years to come.

Some groups engage in this kind of planning process long before the win. At Outfront Minnesota, the board committed to a progressive, intersectional mission the summer before they secured marriage. Even before winning, Basic Rights Oregon (BRO) had already begun to talk about post-marriage work with their supporters, and their website clearly states: “We have three issues: racial justice, transgender health policy, and marriage equality.” This positioning sets BRO up to have their supporters fully aware of what their ongoing work looks like beyond marriage, which they are on the brink of winning.

This kind of planning process also allows organizations to be intentional about the continued existence of their organization. At the end of the process, an organization that continues operations will be clear and resolute in its purpose and mission.

But this process also allows organizations to address the very question of their continued existence. In 2009, Connecticut’s Love Makes a Family went through a deliberate strategic planning process that resulted in their closure, a case which we examine more closely in a later section. Likewise, in Minnesota’s strategic planning process, Project 515 came to the decision to sunset their organization in 2014. In both cases, the act of participating in a strategic planning process led to the decision to close but to do so in a way that intentionally preserved and transferred capacity and resources.
WHAT IS THE ROLE OF A STATE LGBTQ ADVOCACY GROUP AFTER ACHIEVING MARRIAGE?

“What’s next?” is not the only difficult question state-based organizations must wrestle with after winning the freedom to marry. Immediately on the other side of the marriage milestone are other tough questions: Who are we? What do we do? How do we create change? What do LGBTQ people in our state need from us? What can we accomplish?

The role of the state-based group after marriage is tied up in these answers, and post-marriage groups must plan for the future and consider their roles with several key factors in mind:

- Organizational mission
- Political landscape
- LGBTQ community needs
- LGBTQ movement landscape

In the following pages, we consider how each of these variables helped determine the direction of MassEquality and EqualityMaine once they secured the freedom to marry.

Organizational Mission

A state organization’s first consideration of post-marriage work should center on mission and vision. A key question to answer from the outset: has the group been solely focused on marriage?

Because EqualityMaine was a long-standing multi-issue organization, they did not need to revise their mission after achieving marriage, only the focus of it. Even before beginning the strategic planning process, the board decided that there was no question as to whether or not the work was complete — they knew there was more to do.

In the case of MassEquality and Love Makes a Family, at the time marriage was won, that issue was the singular focus of both their mission and their work. Love Makes a Family made the decision to close, deciding not to become, as former Executive Director Anne Stanback put it, “an organization in search of a mission.” This decision was based on the results of community needs assessments and a thorough stakeholder process.

MassEquality, on the other hand, did go in search of a mission, which has evolved in the years since winning marriage. Today, their mission is much broader than even LGBTQ equality. Executive Director Kara Coredini explains that the mission intentionally does not mention that the organization focuses its work only on the LGBTQ population; instead, it focuses on addressing the oppression that
comes from a system of gender and identity norms. The mission, along with the tagline “Equal, safe, and free, from cradle to grave,” has allowed MassEquality to move into new policy areas that focus on community well-being rather than specific legal protections for LGBTQ people. This mission was created by the board and staff during the 2012 strategic planning process and was based on a needs assessment and stakeholder input, as well as the expertise of the staff and board of the organization.

Organizational mission should be a starting point for the conversation, but it does not necessarily determine the fate of the organization. If there is a need in the community and the will among leadership, the mission can be changed or updated.

**Political Landscape**

Another primary consideration regarding the future of an equality group is the political landscape in the state. Is there a credible threat to the marriage law? Could it be weakened or repealed by the legislature? Could a court overturn it? Could it be repealed by a popular vote? Do supportive legislators, governors, or judges need electoral support in the coming cycles? All of these situations give state equality groups, regardless of all other considerations, a mission-specific reason to continue to exist.

MassEquality faced a threat to the marriage law for three years after their 2004 win, which gave the organization time before they had to address questions of what to do next. In cases where there is a credible threat, organizations may be able to use the time that it takes to protect marriage to broaden their mission and their work. Unlike MassEquality, Love Makes a Family did not need to protect the Connecticut law and thus had no mission-specific reason to go on.

In addition to political questions around the marriage law, state-based organizations should consider whether there are other pieces of legislation that need to be passed. In many states where we have won marriage, many of the legal protections our member organizations typically advocate for, such as nondiscrimination and safe schools, are already in place. But occasionally, organizations have more progress to make to complete their legislative agendas.

At the time marriage passed, Connecticut and Massachusetts both lacked important nondiscrimination protections for transgender people. Maryland faced this same scenario until in 2014, two years after winning marriage, the legislature passed a bill protecting transgender Marylanders. Minnesota passed marriage in 2013, but their safer schools bill was not passed until April 2014. And as we gain more wins in the courts, we may end up with states where marriage is legal, but LGBTQ people are not protected from discrimination in employment, housing, or public accommodations.

In Connecticut, Love Makes a Family had worked in their final few years toward passage of a nondiscrimination bill protecting transgender people; it was the one non-marriage issue they tackled. Love Makes a Family decided to close, but they put aside money in their closing plan to hire
an organizer to work directly for the transgender coalition. Led by the Connecticut TransAdvocacy Coalition, the Connecticut Women’s Education and Legal Fund, the ACLU, and Planned Parenthood, the coalition eventually secured passage of the legislation.

In Massachusetts in 2012, eight years after winning marriage, MassEquality worked with fellow Equality Federation member, Massachusetts Transgender Political Coalition, to add gender identity protections to their nondiscrimination law. The two groups continue to work to improve that law.

The post-marriage moment also provides an important time for organizations to reconsider their previous legislative goals, with an eye for legal protections beyond nondiscrimination, safe schools, and marriage that may have been left out in the past. MassEquality, for example, took up LGBTQ youth homelessness, working with the governor and the legislature to address access and root causes of the problem. EqualityMaine is in the process of developing their legislative goals but has identified inclusive health care for transgender people as a potential legislative issue.

The final piece of the political landscape to consider is power. The work that goes into building a successful marriage campaign creates a great deal of power. State equality organizations and the movement as a whole must consider where LGBTQ political power will be held if the organization that helped build that power closes.

As former EqualityMaine political director Ali Vander Zanden pointed out: this power, which is built on political and coalition relationships, as well as grassroots engagement, has an “expiration date.” These organizations — their staff, boards, and supporters; their brand, reputation, and political clout; their history and knowledge — are the infrastructure of the LGBTQ movement. They have the potential to be on the forefront of a new wave in LGBTQ politics, one that promotes not only legal equality but also equality of outcomes and community well-being. In this post-marriage movement, groups can harness their power to create communities in which LGBTQ people thrive in all facets of life, from school and the workplace to physical and mental health.

In the absence of careful planning, the dissolution of the LGBTQ political organization can create a vacuum, making it hard to advance future progress. Whether that political power is important to the community’s future progress, transferrable to other organizations, or still viable by the time a decision about the future of the organization is made will depend on the landscape in that state and the community’s needs.

**LGBTQ Community Needs**

When visioning its post-marriage work, a state organization must consider the needs of the community it serves and represents. Marriage provides access to many protections under the law, but the passage of marriage does not dismantle the systematic oppression faced by LGBTQ people every day. State groups must consider their role in addressing and dismantling the system of oppression that exists long after same-sex couples are allowed to say, “I do.”
Identifying community needs is a core piece of understanding the opportunities and challenges of an organization’s role after marriage. Seeking out community input may involve surveys, town hall meetings, and stakeholder interviews to understand what the community wants and needs for an organization.

One difficulty that groups face in soliciting community input is ensuring that all members of the community are given a chance to be heard, not just those who are on the existing member and donor list. EqualityMaine’s community outreach plan set goals around geographic and demographic representation in both the online community survey and the dozens of in-depth stakeholder interviews. They wanted to make sure that the survey made it beyond their usual list so they reached out to partners all over the state, phone banked to recruit survey takers, and asked people to share the survey on social networks. The results of this outreach were successful, and in the end, EqualityMaine heard from youth, elders, people of color, trans people, lower income people, and residents of rural areas — all parts of the LGBTQ community they wanted to make sure to cover.

**LGBTQ Movement Landscape**

After gathering community stakeholder input, state groups should map community needs to existing organizations to determine if they remain relevant. Although it’s not wrong to be an organization in search of a mission, a state group’s new mission and work should not be duplicative of work that is already happening in the state. Certainly, two groups can be both working on a certain issue — LGBTQ oppression is complex, and multiple approaches are often necessary to dismantle it. But if the strategy and tactics of the two groups are too similar, the organizations may find themselves competing for resources.

In considering the movement landscape as a part of their role, the post-marriage organization should identify what unique approach or value they bring to the work, compared to other organizations in the landscape.

Both Love Makes a Family and EqualityMaine included leaders from other LGBTQ advocacy groups in their stakeholder process to clearly understand the movement landscape. In Connecticut, for example, membership expressed interest in a large number of topics, from youth issues to advancing marriage on a federal level. None of these topics were the specialty of Love Makes a Family, and in fact, other competent groups in the state were working on these issues. In planning their closing, Love Makes a Family worked to connect their members with these other organizations. The result is that many former board members, volunteers, and staff are now actively involved in the work and leadership of other LGBTQ and progressive organizations in the state.

In Maine, smaller groups working on youth and elder issues expressed interest in continuing to work in coalition with EqualityMaine, which has more capacity and experience working with lawmakers than these smaller organizations. In turn, EqualityMaine’s strategic planning process included
discussions on how they can use their capacity to help build the leadership of these other groups. In the months since approving and implementing their strategic plan, EqualityMaine has partnered with Maine TransNet, providing capacity building trainings, meeting space, and joint community outreach. The group has also joined with a regional LGBTQ youth group to build a year-long leadership development program.

**Strategic Closing**

During the strategic planning process, it may become apparent that the work of a certain organization is complete. Perhaps the group had a marriage specific mission, and there is little interest in creating a new one; perhaps the landscape analysis shows that there are other groups working on the issues identified by the community needs assessment. No matter what the ultimate reason for closing, it is important that the sunset be done in an intentional and strategic way, as to preserve and transfer capacity, momentum, and resources back to the movement.

The way that Love Makes a Family closed offers a case study in how to sunset an organization strategically. First, Love Makes a Family engaged a consultant long active with the Federation and in the national LGBTQ movement to assist in this process. Although, going into the process, the leadership did not know that closure would be the result, having a strategic planner made the decision-making process easier. The planner facilitated a full strategic plan, including stakeholder interviews, focus groups, and a member survey. The strategic planning committee included board members as well as community members external to the organization. The strategic plan that the committee produced outlined the goals of the organization for the following nine months, which included a communications strategy for making the announcement of the closure public.

Goals for the final year of Love Makes a Family’s operation included:

- Passage of a marriage codification bill in the general assembly in a way that allowed more swing legislators to finally “get on the right side of history”
- Limited administrative work to ensure smooth implementation of marriage
- Statewide training to ensure that couples, clergy, and justices of the peace fully understood the new law
- Lobbying of the Connecticut congressional delegation to ensure their public support for DOMA repeal

In addition, the strategic plan goals included capturing the history of the organization, celebrating success, and attempting to “be a good model of how to go out of business.” The outcomes of these goals are still tangible; Love Makes a Family archived files with Yale University Library. In addition, Love Makes a Family granted their remaining assets to other organizations doing LGBTQ work in Connecticut, including funding for an organizer position for one year at another organization to support work toward the passage of transgender nondiscrimination protections as well as funding to GLAD to continue its work on DOMA repeal. The organization also connected their members to organizations doing other LGBTQ work in the state. Finally, Love Makes a Family decided to maintain a PAC for several years in case the need to protect pro-LGBTQ legislators arose.
WHAT DOES POST-MARRIAGE WORK LOOK LIKE? HOW DO ORGANIZATIONS NEED TO CHANGE AND ADAPT TO THIS NEW POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT?

For years, marriage has been the most prominent issue associated with the LGBTQ movement. From the media to everyday supporters, the attention and energy that’s tied to marriage is fierce. That reality leaves organizations that have won marriage facing a new and uncharted environment. They no longer have an exciting and energizing issue upon which to organize and educate. They no longer have a clear and recognized agenda. They no longer have a frame that’s tested and proven to be effective.

Organizations that decide to continue their work post-marriage come face-to-face with the fact that, though they have achieved wins that provide critical protections, the systematic oppression faced by LGBTQ people must still be dismantled.

Although EqualityMaine’s mission remained the same even after winning marriage and undergoing strategic planning — achieving “full equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people in Maine” — the organization’s post-marriage work centered around its definition of “full equality.”

What does it mean to be fully equal as an LGBTQ person living in Maine?

The vision of EqualityMaine points to a state in which LGBTQ people have “full equality in the hearts and minds of Maine people and in all areas of the law.” Former Executive Director Betsy Smith points to the fact that more than 40% of Mainers voted against marriage; thus, more work remains to win the hearts and minds of those who call Maine home.

While former EqualityMaine Political Director Ali Vander Zanden agrees that more work must be done, she’s interested in a shift away from framing those efforts using the “hearts and minds” rhetoric:

“It’s saying that our equality depends on what other people think of us.” Full equality, she insists, goes beyond that to a “community well-being approach.” She asks: “Are our health outcomes the same as people who are not LGBT? Is our financial well-being and security the same as people who are not LGBT?” What Ali envisions is a type of political advocacy that focuses not on a set of equal protections under the law — but on equal outcomes for LGBTQ people.

EqualityMaine’s new strategic plan embraces this vision of community well-being and helps to define the work of a next generation LGBTQ organization. Although EqualityMaine still has a seat at the table in Augusta, the state capital, they are also working to build youth leadership in Rockland, a small coastal community. Their rural organizing project will kick off in 2014 and has no initial policy change objectives. This project endeavors to make the lives of rural, LGBTQ Mainers safer by giving people living in the vast rural areas a sense of community.

That is not to say that there will be no future policy objectives for EqualityMaine’s new programs; rather, this initial work will help them to develop relationships and expertise in the most vulnerable parts of the LGBTQ community, which will position them to discover what’s needed — including
new policy innovations and legacy policy implementation — to achieve their vision of “equality of outcomes.”

Before EqualityMaine finalized their new strategic plan and began working toward winning “equality of outcomes,” they contacted MassEquality, the organization that won the freedom to marry for all Massachusetts families in 2004, for advice. Like all the leaders who have contacted MassEquality over the years, they asked, “What’s next?”

What’s next, says MassEquality’s Associate Director Carly Burton, is “all the same things as before. Kids are still getting bullied. There are so many more things that affect LGBT people.” Kara specified: “Implementation is the thing that we have to do. We’ve had broad victories but not deep victories. Forty percent of our homeless youth are LGBT, but we have marriage.” In other words, plenty of work remains to be done.

MassEquality took on the challenging question of organizational identity, and through their 2012 strategic planning process, they defined a mission that focused on community outcomes beyond equal rights, and they developed a political strategy to make these outcomes a reality. This mission has begun to shape the kind of work they do.

MassEquality is still fighting for protections under the law, but they are also working to identify and peel away the layers of oppression that affect LGBTQ people, especially when LGBTQ people suffer multiple oppressions. The bulk of the political work they pursue now is outside of the narrow framework of identity-based equality.

Much of MassEquality’s legislative agenda involves advocating for funding of programs, populations, and studies in the state budget. A good example of this work is evidenced by the governor’s creation of a commission to study the issue of unaccompanied homeless youth in Massachusetts. MassEquality led the lobbying efforts to have the commission created and funded — and representative of the unique issues facing LGBTQ homeless youth by ensuring they had a seat at the table. This kind of political work fits well within the new organizational frame of “Equal, Safe, and Free – from Cradle to Grave,” and addresses not only LGBTQ identity-specific issues but those that emerge at the intersection of class, race, and structural inequalities. In this work, MassEquality is part of a broad coalition of non-LGBTQ youth organizations and homeless service providers to address youth homelessness. In addition to legislative and administrative advocacy, MassEquality prioritizes electing and supporting pro-LGBTQ candidates.

Although EqualityMaine and MassEquality are on different stages of the journey of developing as a post-marriage organization, both groups are on a similar track. Their missions now extend beyond the frame of fairness and equality to working on dismantling systematic oppression faced by LGBTQ people, especially the most vulnerable among us: elders, youth, people experiencing homelessness, transgender people who need access to health care. This is the next generation of the movement.
CAN STATE EQUALITY GROUPS REMAIN VIABLE AFTER WINNING MARRIAGE? WHO FUNDS THIS NEW WORK?

When we began this research, state groups asked us to look into which funders are interested in investing in post-marriage organizations. It is clear that there is not yet a coalition of funders that is fueling this work in the same coordinated way that marriage has been funded in the past. So these questions — Can state equality groups remain viable after marriage? Who funds this new work? — aren’t going away, but post-marriage groups are trying to find answers to them.

For MassEquality, funding their new work is more complicated than funding marriage work. Kara reports that their revenue split is approximately 25 percent from traditional foundation funding, 25 percent from grassroots-level individual contributions, and 50 percent from major donors. This split is indicative of the fact that most of MassEquality’s work is not the focus of the major LGBTQ funders or even of many major donors who funded marriage.

Kara points out that on one hand, funders must make a choice between funding states with few legal protections and funding states with a full slate of rights and protections. On the other hand, Kara believes that funding the kind of work that MassEquality does is in the best interest of the movement as a whole — because more and more states are going to be in the position that Massachusetts is in now, where the laws are in place, but LGBTQ people are still not fully equal or fully included in our communities.

“As more and more states win,” Kara asked, “how will we fund these states? It’s a sustainability question for the movement.”

Lack of funding from the traditional LGBTQ funders is not the only problem. As the work in the post-marriage movement becomes increasingly focused on intersectional issues, grassroots and major donors, particularly wealthy and middle-class LGB people, are less directly affected by the work. Because these likely donors do not feel the same personal interest in other issues — especially issues impacting vulnerable populations like transgender people and LGBTQ youth of color and even employment and housing nondiscrimination — their drive to give is simply not there in the same ways it was for marriage.
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STATE-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

To ensure that we’re building a strong movement that ensures lasting equality, we have developed the following recommendations, which are focused on developing sustainable LGBTQ organizations that keep working, thriving, and winning after marriage.

1. Invest in a robust strategic planning process that involves the community and engages leadership in wrestling with tough questions.

Immediately after a campaign or court win, issues of organizational identity will become instantly relevant. A short-term post-win plan for celebration and implementation is necessary, but a longer term strategic plan is absolutely critical.

The Federation recommends that post-marriage organizations engage in a full strategic planning process, with an initial focus on organizational identity. A robust process involves substantial resources of both time and money to complete. This kind of work can take three to six months to complete and is best done with a consultant to facilitate the process.

We suggest groups begin this process as early as possible, preferably before entering a marriage campaign phase or when it becomes evident that a viable court case will advance. At a minimum, the board should begin to have these conversations as part of campaign planning and commit to entering a full-scale planning phase immediately after the win.

As we approach a foreseeable future in which we will have a federal decision on marriage, all state-based groups should begin planning for this uncharted future.

Involving the community
Community engagement is a key component of any effective strategic planning process, and for state-based groups, going to the community to solicit feedback just after or right before a marriage win is critical. A community input process not only helps inform the strategic plan; it also gives the community a sense of continued involvement and investment in the work to come. This step in the process signals to the community that the organization is still working, and it sets the stage for the eventual unveiling of the completed strategic plan.

It is important to remember that community members and stakeholders may not have all of the answers, and their input will not necessarily provide clear direction to an organization about how to effectively move forward. Even with community input, organizational leadership will have important strategic decisions to make.

Wrestling with the hard questions
An effective strategic planning process requires that leadership asks — and answers — tough questions about an organization’s mission, vision, and theory of change (how the organization accomplishes its mission, e.g., grassroots organizing, lobbying, community education, etc.).
Before deciding what’s next after marriage, organizations must understand their place in the movement and the unique value they brings. To get to that point, organizations must be able to answer the following questions:

- Who are we? (mission)
- For what purpose do we build and wield LGBTQ power? (vision)
- What do we have the power to change in our state? (agenda)
- What is our theory of change?
- How will we fund our work (fee-for-service, grants, endowment, major donors, etc.)?
- What is our unique value in our state (skills, resources, competitive advantage, reputation, etc.)? Who else in our state does similar work, and how is our work different?

The post-marriage moment also provides an important time for organizations to reconsider their previous legislative goals, with an eye to legal protections beyond nondiscrimination, safe schools, and marriage that may have been left out in the past. On one hand, certain issues may have been overshadowed by the focus on marriage. On the other hand, the momentum of winning marriage may provide an environment that is newly favorable to other pro-LGBTQ legislation. The post-marriage moment can be a creative space that allows for policy innovations that help protect LGBTQ people and their families from cradle to grave. The development of a new policy agenda will likely emerge as the group works through the process of reframing their work.

2. **Shift the frame of the work, then communicate it clearly.**

The most successful post-marriage organizations have taken conscious steps to reframe their work, moving away from a narrow identity-based rights frame to a broader one that is intersectional, outcomes-based, and focused on achieved lived equality. Often this approach translates into work that is about full implementation of previous policy wins, policy innovations that support the most vulnerable populations, and new programs working with young people, LGBTQ elders, and others who have been underserved.

This intersectional work requires state groups to work in coalition, not always as the leader of a coalition, as may have been the case during marriage campaigns. This intersectional work requires state groups to develop new partnerships across movements, across cultures, across generations. This intersectional work requires state groups to rebuild bridges that may have been destroyed and repair relationships that may have been damaged during the marriage campaign.

Working in this new frame isn’t easy. And an organization may require training, organizational development, and capacity building before they can truly understand racial justice, economic justice, and transgender inclusion in the ways that are necessary to succeeding in this new post-marriage frame.
Once an organization shifts the frame of their work internally and sets forth a new strategic plan, this new approach to the work must be communicated externally — a new and equally difficult challenge.

All organizations must face the reality that although much advocacy work remains, be it cultural or political, it is unlikely that they will find another issue that galvanizes, mobilizes, and inspires the way marriage did.

In a post-marriage landscape, equality groups will have to work harder to communicate their mission and strategies to the various audiences that matter, from supporters to the media to donors. Groups must figure out how to effectively communicate to stakeholders why and how the work is changing, why and how their support is still needed.

Ideally, groups will begin to communicate what’s next before the win. This kind of preparation and groundwork will become even more important as marriage wins continue to come down from the courts, often at the most unexpected times. If a group has not been doing “what’s next” framing before the marriage win, it should develop an aggressive communications plan for use throughout the strategic planning process through the release of the new strategic plan and beyond.

3. Be prepared to seek out new funding sources.

Many LGBTQ funders understand that we are building a movement for lasting equality, not working on single issues or running campaigns. But they do not yet see why it’s critical to support organizations that are beyond the marriage milestone.

Until funders interested in this post-marriage work emerge, organizations will need to make some changes to the way they raise money.

Rather than relying on institutional funders to cover large portions of their budgets, organizations must grow robust individual donor programs, reaching both major and grassroots givers. The major donor program must take relationships with marriage-motivated givers to the next level while simultaneously finding new people who can give. The grassroots program may require more energy than before, without the excitement of a marriage campaign, and state groups may have to use new strategies, both online and offline, for finding low-dollar donors.

To support these fundraising efforts, groups must develop and elevate a clear and strong brand that is distinct from marriage and rooted in the exploration and decisions made during strategic planning around organizational identity. Often, organizations experiencing a post-campaign budget crunch are tempted to cut communications and branding dollars, resulting in a deafening silence after the loud and boisterous push for marriage. In a post-marriage moment, investing in smart strategies that will effectively tell the story of who you are and what you do — separate from marriage — is critical. If we want our target audiences to believe in our new vision and our new approach for the work, we have to ensure they hear about it.
4. Consider closing carefully and strategically.

Although the Federation believes in a strong state-based movement, we realize that not every organization will remain operational after securing the freedom to marry, especially organizations whose primary mission and purpose was marriage. If organizations decide to close, we recommend that they do so carefully and strategically — and with just as much planning as an organization that decides to continue.

For organizations that decide to sunset, the Federation recommends developing a plan that:

- Makes time and space to celebrate success, to allow the community that’s been organized and mobilized to enjoy its victory.
- Details a timeline for closing.
- Sets a final legislative agenda, as needed.
- Documents how you'll communicate your closing to target audiences, including messaging and a schedule for roll out.
- Creates a process for effectively preserving or transferring the political power (supporter lists, relationships, etc.) your organization has built.
- Determines how to disperse any assets in a way that supports other LGBTQ or allied organizations.
- Determines how to settle any liabilities.
- Determines what to do about tax exempt status.
- Creates a process for archiving your most important organizational documents with a university or LGBTQ historical archive.
- Details an exit strategy for staff, including professional development and job search assistance.
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUNDERS

To ensure that LGBTQ organizations are sustainable and able to continue advancing equality after winning marriage, we have developed the following recommendations for funders.

1. **Fund post-marriage strategic planning for states leading up to marriage and immediately following marriage wins.**

   LGBTQ political power can be (and often is) effectively developed, held, and mobilized at a statewide level. Winning marriage builds power and momentum that can be leveraged to take us into the next phase of this movement. But not without a plan.

   Post-marriage organizations that have not created and communicated a plan for what follows a marriage win risks losing political power, community support, and momentum as they grapple with this question in the aftermath of a victory.

   It’s critical that funders provide support for state-based organizations to engage in strategic planning leading up to or immediately following a marriage win. Groups need the time and space to engage in these critical conversations and wrestle with these tough questions if they’re going to move forward and continue advancing equality for LGBTQ people.

   If we want a movement after marriage, we have to plan for one, and that planning must start now.

2. **Conduct further study into post-marriage state groups to identify impactful, replicable work and develop funding opportunities.**

   As more and more states will find themselves in a post-marriage position in the coming years, it is critical that movement funders evolve with the organizations doing work on the ground.

   While it is incumbent upon state groups to identify and cultivate new sources of funding, it is important that movement funders begin to strategically direct funding at this new sector.

   In some states, funding may support increasingly intersectional work as state groups begin chipping away at the multiple forms of oppression that members of our community face. In other states, financial support may lead to new partnerships and coalitions as movement groups come together with human service, policy, and even cultural and social organizations to address youth homelessness, health care access, and beyond. In the near future, court decisions may bring marriage to states with no other legal protections, and these groups, many of which have never forged a robust legislative campaign, will need financial support to build toward future victories.

   If we want to achieve lived equality — freedom from prejudice, freedom to be who we are and live without facing nearly insurmountable obstacles, freedom to love and be loved — we need the resources to keep moving ahead.
3. Invest in developing a community of practice for post-marriage organizations.
For years at the Federation, we’ve seen the power of bringing movement leaders together. Through regional cohorts in the South and in the Midwest, we’ve watched state organizations forge collaborations, learn important lessons about what works (and what doesn’t), and strengthen their ability to do groundbreaking work in their home states.

The movement after marriage is so untested and uncertain that state-based organizations need a community of practice now more than ever. Not only can post-marriage groups learn from one another, they can also collaboratively chart what’s next. In partnership with national leaders and funders, post-marriage groups can help determine the next phase of our movement.

A community of practice that begins today may bring together leaders from the 17 states that are currently working beyond the marriage milestone. But in the near future, hopefully, this community of practice will have to adjust and reconfigure to include all state-based organizations, following a marriage decision by the Supreme Court. When that moment arrives, it’s possible that we’ll have 29 states that have secured marriage but still don’t provide LGBT people with critical nondiscrimination protections. The challenges facing those 29 states will be unlike anything we’ve faced before, making a community of practice even more imperative.

Building a community of practice that works today — and is able to grow and change when the time comes — demands resources, but those resources will support the development of a movement that continues to win, long after the freedom to marry.
CONCLUSION

At Equality Federation, we’ve been partnering with state-based organizations that are beyond the marriage milestone for the past year. We’ve seen the obstacles they’re facing, helped them navigate the landscape, and supported them as they’ve seized critical opportunities.

We’re committed to continuing to partner with these organizations in the months and years to come. Our plan to support the post-marriage movement is threefold.

First, we have begun providing tailored support to state-based organizations that have achieved the marriage milestone. With our extensive experience in leadership and organizational development, we’re working directly with executive directors, boards of directors, and stakeholders to help groups determine what’s next. From strategic planning to executive transition management to leadership coaching, we’re helping to ensure state groups are able to step into their next phase of their work and thrive.

Next, we are starting a national conversation about our movement beyond the marriage milestone. It’s critical that state-based leaders, national advocates, and funders wrestle with these key questions about the future of our post-marriage state groups. From a series of op-eds published in partnership with the leaders of post-marriage organizations to presentations and conversations at events like our annual Summer Meeting, we’re committed to starting a dialogue about how we can address the unique challenges and opportunities ahead for post-marriage groups.

Finally, we are creating peer learning opportunities in an effort to build toward a community of practice. We’ve convened post-marriage groups for sharing best practices and innovating together with strong results, and we’re exploring more opportunities to facilitate conversations between groups working beyond the marriage milestone. As we get closer to a Supreme Court decision that will impact all 50 states, we’re beginning to host discussions about the work beyond marriage with leaders in midwest and southern states. The landscape of our movement is changing more rapidly than anyone thought possible, and we strive to ensure that state leaders are able to connect with one another and with the national movement to meet the demands of this complicated environment.
Winning equality in communities we call home