

Engaging in Public Advocacy



How will you engage in public advocacy?

There are many compelling reasons for agreeing to share your story to help others in a similar situation. There are different ways that you can engage in public advocacy. They all involve you sharing your personal story:

- Public speaking during key dates/events
- Engaging with media
- Participating in regular speaking events and meetings with decision-makers through an advocacy organisation.
- Using social media

Remember your story is personal to you, and you don't have to share every part of it; you don't have to share any of it if you do not want to.

Public speaking during key dates/events

- There are key dates and events throughout the year that motivate people to demonstrate their allyship towards trans, gender diverse and non-binary people: Pride Month, Trans Awareness Week, Transgender or Non-Binary Days of Visibility, Transgender Day of Remembrance, IDAHOBIT Day, Wear It Purple Day, etc.
- Private companies, government departments, local councils, schools, etc. often organise small fundraising events, a breakfast or lunch involving a speaker to educate their community or teams and show their support.
- Some of these engagements might feel tokenistic, and you will need to understand who is the organiser, who is the audience, their motivation and yours.

The effects of re-living traumatic experiences



Some public advocacy opportunities rely on stories of trauma that can appeal to people's emotions in order to educate them and gain their support. This can sometimes be referred to as 'trauma porn'.

Re-living traumatic experiences can have a negative mental health impact on you, even if you feel like you have overcome your trauma or you think you are in control of your story.

Burnout is a real risk for public advocates. Seek mental health support from a qualified therapist or psychologist that is affirming and known in the community for their support.

Engaging with media outlets

- Engaging with media as a trans, gender diverse or non-binary (TGDNB) person can be both an opportunity and a risk.
- There is a growing demand for TGDNB lived experiences to be added to public discourses.
- Some efforts are good intentioned and offer visibility and representation opportunities while many are disguised attempts to discredit, shame, attack or add to disinformation.
- Media requests can come from researchers, producers and journalists from specific media outlets or working independently and selling the content to media outlets who might have commissioned the story or project. This means that they will often lie about the purpose and angle of a story or program for the purpose of securing participation.
- It is always important to understand the profile of the person writing the story, their history and the media outlet's history in reporting on and representing trans issues.
- Journalists might ask for information that feels invasive and inappropriate. Decide what you are willing to share before you go public.
- Trans people are often pitted against each other to create sensationalist stories. Do not talk negatively about other trans people, even if you don't share their experiences.

Things to consider

- Lived experiences, visibility and representation are particularly important for the trans community. They help promote understanding, challenge stereotypes and inspire.
- Going public is a bit like "coming out" every time you speak or engage in advocacy.
- Being public results in many different levels of visibility - local level, regional, national, etc.
- You may not have control of your story once it gets out.
- Self-care and constantly re-evaluating your motivation are essential.
- Think about the impact of speaking publicly on your health, family or friends.
- Be mindful of not causing more harm for the community through public advocacy.
- Speak to your own experiences only and do not share other people's stories.

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Social Media

- Social media can be a powerful vehicle for change and the only opportunity to control your narrative and reach many people. But it can also be an uncontrolled risk.
- If you choose to use your real name in your advocacy, be aware of what personal information there is out there that can put you or your family at risk.
- Avoid speaking for the whole community and make it clear that your lived experience is yours only.
- Always check facts and make sure you are not inadvertently contributing to spreading misinformation.
- Avoid engaging with trolls or enter into discussions or debates with haters. They can use your engagement to discredit and harm you and your reputation.

Responding to an advocacy request

STEP 1

Understand the purpose of the activity or project and the intended audience. Take some time to think about where the story, activity or project might go. Find out what the angle of the story or project will be. Ask for the information to be provided in writing to keep as a record.

You can also find out who else might be featured or invited to participate. This will give you a sense of whether the angle of the story or the activity is as it has been described to you. If they can't give you that information, wait until they can before making any decisions.

STEP 2

Decide what you are hoping to get out of your involvement, what your goal is, and what you will be prepared to share.

It is absolutely ok to expect and ask for payment for your involvement or to cover your expenses. Your lived experience and your time are valuable. Ask if they have a budget for speakers to start the conversation.

STEP 3

Reach out to anyone else involved to verify the information you have been given and check if they have been told the same as you.

For any media stories, reach out to community organisations or your contacts to see if they have also been approached and their response.

Tips for evaluating media opportunities



Ask questions

Make sure you understand what the opportunity involves and who it involves, the angle, who else is part of it and the format of the opportunity (live TV, news story, etc.)

Once your story is out on the record, you have no control over how widely it will be shared.

Be prepared

Even if you are careful to speak only from your own experience, find out what are key issues facing the trans community, check the latest statistics and facts, be careful with the language and terminology you use and resist the urge to speak for others.

Make sure you are educated on current laws and policies that impact trans and gender diverse people.

Be safe

Being in the public eye is a vulnerable act. Your safety and the safety of those around you must always be your first priority. Consider making sure you take appropriate precautions to ensure your physical and emotional safety and be prepared to take steps to ensure that your privacy is protected at all times. That might mean using a pseudonym, minimise the amount of private information that you share and knowing who to contact if you feel in danger.

Take care of yourself

No matter how careful you are or what precautions you take, there will always be risks. This is the reality of sharing your personal story in a context with lots of bad-faith actors, ignorance and violence directed at trans people.

It is ok to turn down an opportunity if it doesn't feel right, appropriate or if you need a break.