

# Using CODELs and STAFFDELS to Advance the Human Rights of LGBTQI+ Persons Around the World

CODELs and STAFFDELS are an excellent opportunity for Members of Congress and staff to gain a deeper understanding of the human rights situation for LGBTQI+ persons around the globe. These trips can provide a platform to meet with LGBTQI+ human rights defenders (HRDs) and organizations combating criminalization, violence, and stigma within their countries, particularly in a funding and political landscape that makes it difficult for LGBTQI+ HRDs to travel to the United States.

This guide is designed to help you best prepare for CODELs and STAFFDELS and what questions to ask on your trip.

## **Pre-Trip Resources: Research and Recommendations**

Prepare for the CODEL or STAFFDEL by reviewing the current situation of human rights for LGBTQI+ persons in the country. There are several resources available that can provide an overview of conditions, including:

- [Outright International Country Overviews](#);
- [Human Dignity Trust](#);
- [ILGA World Database](#)
- [ILGA Europe Rainbow Map](#);
- [State Department Human Rights Reports](#).<sup>1</sup>
- You may also consider submitting an inquiry to the Congressional Research Service, as they will be able to pull a briefing document together for your office.

Another resource to use is the [Council for Global Equality \(CGE\)](#), a staffed coalition of more than 45 U.S. based human rights and LGBTQI+ advocacy organizations working at the intersection of human rights for LGBTQI+ persons and U.S. foreign policy. CGE and its members have LGBTQI+ partners around the world and can provide intel on current status updates in countries, as well as recommendations on trusted LGBTQI+ civil society organizations and human rights defenders to meet with during your trip. CGE points of contact include Andrea Gillespie ([andrea@globalequality.org](mailto:andrea@globalequality.org)) and Keifer Buckingham ([keifer@globalequality.org](mailto:keifer@globalequality.org)).

## **Engaging with a Sponsoring Organization**

If you are traveling with a sponsoring organization, it is important to consider ways the organization is planning on incorporating human rights and democracy issues into the trip. Ask the sponsor:

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<sup>1</sup> In 2025, the Trump Administration removed the section that reported on the human rights of LGBTQI+ persons from the State Department 2024 Human Rights Reports. However, reporting from prior years (i.e. 2023 and earlier) can still be found on the State Department's [site](#) and may still contain pertinent information.

- How will they incorporate human rights issues into the trip?
- Will they be organizing a meeting with human rights defenders and civil society organizations?
- If so, will they be inviting representatives from LGBTQI+ organizations to attend?

If the sponsoring organization is not including meetings with civil society organizations during the trip, see if there is flexibility within the schedule. In-country meetings are often crucial for meeting with local human rights defenders and it often can be useful to invite LGBTQI+ organizations to join larger civil society meetings. Their participation alongside other civil society colleagues from more traditional or mainstream groups sends a broader message about acceptance and inclusion, particularly in countries where LGBTQI+ groups remain marginalized or excluded from other civil society spaces.

### **U.S. Embassy Engagement**

Despite a history of bipartisan engagement on the human rights of LGBTQI+ persons for nearly three decades, the State Department has sought to dismantle international protections for LGBTQI+ persons in an effort to implement the Trump Administration's anti-rights agenda globally. While in the past U.S. Embassies regularly collaborated with LGBTQI+ human rights defenders in support of efforts to combat criminalization, violence, and discrimination, this work has largely ground to a halt.

However, your office can and should play a critical role in pressing embassies on the human rights of LGBTQI+ persons during CODELs and STAFFDELS and reaffirm that your constituents - and the American people - care about the dignity of all people around the world. The majority of staff at the State Department and embassies are career foreign service or civil service officers who will continue to serve incoming administrations and should be primed to engage on human rights issues should the political environment change.

#### *Pre-Trip Questions*

In ongoing conversations with the State Department on planning for forthcoming CODELs and STAFFDELS, ask the following questions:

- What is the current engagement and human rights strategy in the country?
- Will the Embassy set aside time to meet with human rights organizations in a roundtable? If so, which ones?
- If the Embassy will not be including a human rights roundtable in the agenda of the trip, will they hold open time on the agenda so your office may meet with human rights defenders?

It is important to proactively request that LGBTQI+ human rights organizations be invited to any meetings that are being held on human rights issues. The names of potential organizations can be provided by the Council for Global Equality and its members, yet, many of these organizations may not feel comfortable attending meetings in the U.S. Embassy in the current

climate.<sup>2</sup> Often, meetings not held on Embassy grounds may facilitate broader participation of human rights defenders.

### *During the Trip Questions*

When in country and depending on the country context, ask the U.S. Embassy the following questions:

- What was the history of engagement with LGBTQI+ organizations for the embassy?
- How is the Embassy responding to violence targeting LGBTQI+ persons in country?
- Have there been any recent changes in law or policy impacting LGBTQI+ persons, either positively or negatively?
- What are the primary impediments to LGBTQI+ participation in educational, economic, political, and social spheres? What role can the embassy play in addressing these barriers?
- Are there any upcoming elections, legislative debates, or court cases likely to affect LGBTQI+ communities?
- Are there existing funding streams or programs that could support legal aid or violence reduction programs that include attention to LGBTQI+ persons, even if not labeled as such?

### **Questions for LGBTQI+ Human Rights Defenders**

Every country will have unique context-driven questions to ask of LGBTQI+ human rights defenders in order to make the most out of your CODEL and STAFFDEL. Below, we have laid out some potential questions to help guide your conversations.

#### *Sample Questions for All Countries Regarding U.S. Foreign Policy*

- What is the relationship between the organization and the U.S. Embassy and U.S. State Department?
- What challenges are LGBTQI+ groups and communities facing in light of U.S. policy changes under the Trump Administration?
- How has your work been impacted by changes to the State Department's annual Human Rights Reports? How did your organization previously use them?
- What governments are stepping up to support the LGBTQI+ community in that country?

#### *Sample Questions for Countries with Criminalization Statutes Impacting LGBTQI+ Persons*

- What are the current significant challenges facing LGBTQI+ people in the country?
- Are criminalization statutes being enforced? If so, what does that look like?
- Are there ongoing legal challenges to criminalization statutes? If so, what is the expected timeline and prognosis for a ruling? If not, what are the barriers to doing so?
- Who are the main opposition groups in the country to the human rights of LGBTQI+ persons? What are their arguments and from where do you view their greatest influence?

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<sup>2</sup> Please connect with the Council for Global Equality as it pertains to sharing the names of specific LGBTQI+ human rights organizations with U.S. Embassies due to safety and security concerns.

- What is the status of access to services, including global health, education, and employment, for LGBTQI+ people in the country?

#### *Sample Questions for Countries with Limited Rights for LGBTQI+ Persons*

- What are the current significant challenges facing LGBTQI+ people in the country?
- What are the current policy priorities for those in the LGBTQI+ community?
- What are the barriers to advancing the human rights of LGBTQI+ persons?
- Who are the main opposition groups in the country and from where do you view their greatest influence?
- How can other countries or international institutions support the local equality movement?
- What incremental changes would most meaningfully improve safety and inclusion of LGBTQI+ people, even absent legal reform?
- Are there specific institutions (courts, ministries, local governments, schools, employers, etc.) where progress is more feasible at this stage?

#### **Do No Harm and Security Considerations**

Engagement with LGBTQI+ human rights defenders should prioritize their safety and consent. These considerations are particularly important in countries with criminalization, surveillance, or active targeting of LGBTQI+ communities. Offices should:

- Be attentive to how venue, visibility, and meeting format may affect participant safety.
- Avoid publicizing meetings or naming participants without prior agreement.

#### **Conclusion**

Thank you for your leadership, and for taking the time to engage with civil society on these issues. Listening to local voices and asking informed questions strengthens U.S. leadership and helps make our foreign policy more credible and effective.