So You Want to Build LGBTQ+ Inclusive Housing?

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BACKGROUND

LGBTQ+ older adults are disproportionately affected by housing discrimination and housing insecurity when compared to non-LGBTQ+ older people. SAGE has long recognized that LGBTQ+-affirming housing is a key stabilizing factor for LGBTQ+ older adults.

Learn more about SAGE's National LGBTQ+ Elder Housing Initiative at sageusa.org/housing.

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Our Successes and Challenges to Developing LGBTQ+-Inclusive Affordable Housing

In 2014, SAGE began actively exploring an LGBTQ+-welcoming elder housing model. SAGE collaborated with developers, BFC Partners and HELP USA to create New York State's two first LGBTQ+-welcoming elder housing developments: Stonewall House in Brooklyn and Crotona Pride House in the Bronx. The housing developers led all aspects of the development process, including feasibility assessment, securing financing, and supervising construction. Throughout this development process, SAGE experienced various successes and challenges that resulted in insights about the development process.

Insights from the Development Process

On-Site Services

Each of these housing developments have the LGBTQ+ culturally responsive services incorporated within. SAGE's primary role in these developments is to operate the on-site SAGE Centers and to provide care management to the elder residents.

Culturally competent services and supports for low-income LGBTQ+ older people help prevent housing insecurity and support healthy aging. Services within the sites are critical to the success of the buildings and can be a significantly distinct aspect in the building design.

The two on-site SAGE Centers host daily program offerings, meals, and access to care

On-Site Services

"Invest in service provision staffing."

management services to residents and members of the local community. SAGE's housing services and care management teams have played key roles in assessing and addressing the aging and health needs of elders in each building.

Tenant coordinators have been instrumental in supporting low-income tenants to maintain their housing stability, recertify their leases, and access community and mental health support in the neighborhood and through external linkages.

SAGE has learned that the presence of these on-site SAGE Centers and housing support teams have supported the wellbeing of both the LGBTQ+ elders and other communities who reside in these buildings.

The pandemic has magnified the importance of investing in a service support plan for a new building, and this may include internal staffing or a robust network of external linkages in the community.

For more information on how to identify and work with a service provider, see the NHI Toolkit Module #6.

Partnership Development

SAGE acknowledges the vital need for secure partnerships in the development process, including partnerships with developers, community members and organizations, public agencies and elected officials, and social services providers.

The success of these housing developments relies specifically on collaboration between the developer, property manager, and service provider. Partners should be selected in accordance with the mission, community need, and commitment to stabilizing LGBTQ+ elders in their housing. Partners in a project must be on the same page regarding vision, process, staffing, and culture of the residence. This is a long-term relationship, so establishing cohesion, trust, and efficiency amongst partners helps cultivate the same for the tenants of the building.

Partnership Development

"Prioritize mission alignment and shared vision."

Clear communication between partners helps meet the needs of the tenants, and this piece was critical in helping to integrate the building and SAGE into the surrounding communities.

SAGE cultivated relationships with two developer partners: BFC Partners for Stonewall House and HELP USA for Crotona Pride House.

In addition, SAGE and our developer partners worked closely with city agencies, including:

- The New York City Department of Housing Preservation, and Development (HPD)
- The New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA)
- The New York City Department of Aging (DFTA)
- The New York City Housing Development Corporation (HDC)

Throughout the process, SAGE and our developer partners engaged various elected officials and philanthropic partners in the early phases of development. SAGE also consulted with LGBTQ+ community-based organizations across the nation on best

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practices in outreach to LGBTQ+ elders, marketing and service provisions.

A the ommunity moved into the building, partner hip development continued to evolve: SAGE introduced partnerships with local politicians, police precincts, and community groups to ensure that resident needs were met.

SAGE's housing staff also found that moving older individuals and formerly homeless households into affordable housing during the pandemic required additional mental health services. To improve upon the current service model, SAGE established referral pathways and partnerships to offer mental health services to residents.

For more information on choosing partners with mission alignment, see the NHI Toolkit Module #5.

Outreach to Potential LGBTQ+ Tenants

To identify LGBTQ+ elders who were interested in LGBTQ+ elder housing and qualified for affordable housing, SAGE engaged in rigorous outreach to LGBTQ+ elders in the community. This included attending LGBTQ+ community spaces and venues such as Pride events, places of worship, social gathering

Outreach to Potential LGBTQ+ Tenants
"Begin targeted engagement early."

spaces, and bars to inform the community of these new housing developments.

SAGE hosted tabling events and conducted several presentations at community board meetings, LGBTQ+ centers, and public workshops. SAGE connected and built new relationships with community leaders and groups in the local residence neighborhoods and worked closely with Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC)-focused nonprofit groups.

Outreach materials were translated into Spanish, and the outreach staff worked to ensure materials were language accessible.

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Through this outreach, SAGE staff educated LGBTQ+ elders and community members about the buildings and the registration process.

Lastly, SAGE recorded where and how data was collected to map outreach, scope, and neighborhood demographics.
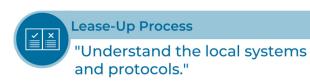
For more information on reaching LGBTQ+ tenants, see the NHI Toolkit Module #2.

Lease-Up Process

Stonewall House and Crotona Pride House utilized different processes to develop a list of prospective, qualified candidates.

Stonewall House, which is managed by the NYC Housing Authority (NYCHA) through the NextGen initiative was able to use a first-come, first-serve application process the day units became available, which allowed for eligible LGBTQ+ elders to apply as soon as the applications went live.

Lease-Up Process

"Understand the local systems and protocols."

Crotona Pride House went through the typical Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) process, utilizing the Housing Connect referral system to recruit tenants.

The Housing Connect process relies on tenants to apply for a residence and then utilizes a lottery system to place residents in the building. The lottery system made it challenging to ensure that eligible LGBTQ+ elders were reflected in the tenant pool.

This was an important lesson for SAGE in understanding the affordable housing lease-up process, and demonstrated a need for policy shifts to ensure that LGBTQ+-affirming buildings can realize their goal to provide housing for the LGBTQ+ elder community.

Funding

Both of these development projects secured HPD'S Senior Affordable Rental Apartments (SARA) funding to provide financial support for the development of affordable housing for low-income elders, 62+ years of age, with a percentage of units set aside for formerly homeless tenants, which included ongoing support in the form of direct services to formerly homeless households. HUD Tenant-Based Section 8 is a federal program that provides rental assistance to low-income residents. The Section 8 vouchers are attached to a specific unit within the building and are referred to as project-based Section 8 vouchers. Other sources of funding included grants, deferred developer fees, and tax-exempt bonds.

SAGE and the developer partners faced some challenges in securing funding for both Stonewall House and Crotona Pride House, and there were unanticipated gaps in funding, which forced both SAGE and the developers to

Funding

"Adaptability and creativity are key."

secure additional capital funding. SAGE acknowledges that in order to develop LGBTQ+-inclusive and affordable housing, all partners involved in the development process should practice both adaptability and creativity in securing capital; unanticipated gaps in funding are probable throughout the development process.

In the end, BFC Partners secured construction funding for Stonewall House through the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC), the City of New York Housing Development Corporation (HDC), the City of New York Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD), the van Ameringen Foundation, the Calamus Foundation, and The Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation.

The remaining construction funding was funded by the New York State Homes and Community Renewal Community Investment Fund (HCR CIF) program. An additional capital grant from New York City Design and Development Corp. championed by Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams and New York City Council Majority Leader Laurie Cumbo covered the expenses for SAGE Center Brooklyn at the residence.

Construction funding for Crotona Pride House and SAGE Center Bronx was secured from Sterling National Bank and LIHTC, HPD, HCR, and Re olution A fund from New York City Coun il Member Ritchie Torres and Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz, Jr., New York State Energy Research & Development Authority.

The Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation provided funding for the capital construction needs of the SAGE Center at the residence though capital funding from foundations remains rare. The project also received a grant from the New York Regional Economic Development program championed by Assembly Member Blake.

Leasing up During the COVID-19 Pandemic

As the COVID-19 pandemic gripped the nation, New York City was hit particularly hard by the first wave of the pandemic. New residents and formerly homeless households moved into Stonewall House just weeks before the pandemic shutdown, which presented particular challenges.

Housing staff were on-site at Stonewall House every week throughout the pandemic, ensuring that tenants had food, medication, healthcare, PPE, and information regarding safety and isolation

Leasing up During the COVID-19 Pandemic

"Supporting tenants in crises requires flexibility and investment."

during the public health crisis. LGBTQ+ residents experienced social isolation, death of residents within the buildings, and resurfacing trauma from memories of the AIDS epidemic.

Furthermore, construction on SAGE Center Brooklyn was halted due to COVID, delaying the center's completion. Once construction was complete, public health guidelines prohibited in-person elder programming from March of 2020 until the summer of 2021. During this time of rapid response for Stonewall House residents, Crotona Pride House was beginning to lease-up units, which took considerably longer due to the pandemic's

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impact on governing systems, protocols, and community crisis response.

In re pon e to COVID 19, SAGE Center adapted and pivoted to virtual programming for LGBTQ+ elders. SAGE provided tablets for residents to communicate virtually and offered socially distant technology training for elders that wanted assistance in learning how to use their tablet effectively.

To help break isolation and address challenges during this time, Stonewall House residents also began creating interest groups of their own; Stonewall House tenants formed a tenant association to advocate for their support within the building. SAGE has been able to partner with this association to uplift the LGBTQ+ elders in the building.

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Six SAGE takeaways from developing LGBTQ+-inclusive, affordable elder housing

1 Invest in service provision staffing.

2 Prioritize mission alignment and shared vision.

3 Begin targeted engagement early.

4 Understand the local systems and protocols.

5 Adaptability and creativity are key.

6 Supporting tenants in crises requires flexibility and investment.

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Step-by-Step: The Lessons We Learned

There are five various stages in the housing development process: pre-development, feasibility analysis, financing, construction, and operations. We recognize that these steps are not always linear – partnership building, securing capital and fundraising, and community engagement and buy-in are ongoing through the housing development process. Construction and lease-up can take unanticipated turns that cause developers to go back to the drawing board. Regardless of the non-linearity of these steps, SAGE has identified several lessons from each of these steps in the process, outlined below.

1. Engage the Community From Ideation Onwards

Over the subsequent four decades before this housing was launched, SAGE engaged in discussions with donors, board members, constituents, and activists and began documenting LGBTQ+ elders' housing challenges and the need to create housing for the older LGBTQ+ community. In 2014, SAGE's Board of Directors voted to enable the organization to explore a range of housing models. SAGE's leadership connected

> *"SAGE's exploration of LGBTQ+-welcoming housing dates back to the 1980s."*

with LGBTQ+ community-based organizations to understand how to bring this project to life and to learn more about best practices in LGBTQ+-friendly housing developments across the nation.

2. Internal and External Partnership Building is Crucial

HELP USA sought to explore building LGBTQ+-affirming affordable housing in the Crotona neighborhood of the Bronx on an existing HELP USA-owned property (a former parking lot).

BFC Partners was interested in partnering with SAGE on a NextGen NYCHA program application to propose the development of a LGBTQ+-friendly elder housing building in Brooklyn. NextGen is a

> *"In 2015, two developers approached SAGE about two separate proposed LGBTQ+ welcoming housing projects in the Bronx and Brooklyn."*

part of a ten-year strategic plan that will adjust NYCHA's business plan by shifting the way the agency receives funding. The model includes a mechanism that invites private developers to build on the public housing authority sites and to convert units into private management.

STEP-BY-STEP

External partnerships were also important in this process. Cultivating trust is important from the very beginning of the planning process, which means identifying existing relation hip in the ommunity, in luding ele ted offi ial , community boards, community residents, community organizations, and religious or social institutions. Consideration for the complicated history of housing policy and displacement means bringing the needs of local residents and entities into the fold. This was particularly true in working in the neighborhoods of Fort Greene and Crotona in Brooklyn and the Bronx. SAGE worked closely with other community partners in the development process: state agencies, elected officials, philanthropy organizations, police precincts, community organizations, and even in-residence tenant associations. All of these partners were vital in the process of establishing the Stonewall and Crotona Pride developments, as it helped build trust and neighborhood relationships.

3. Understand the Potential Timing of Site Acquisition

For Stonewall House, the NYCHA site was already identified through the NextGen program. For Crotona Pride House, the site was already owned by HELP USA, and the residence was built on a former parking lot. Other projects

"Neither residence required a site acquisition process, saving time for the developer teams in the planning processes."

may need to invest a considerable amount of research, community feedback sessions, and competitive processes to acquire a site. This may include plans for a new building or a building rehab.

4. Construction Takes Time and Intentional Design

There were archaeological finds during the Brooklyn's housing development construction process, which extended the timeline. Construction of Crotona Pride House was also extended due to issues with a nearby building that needed addressing. Both of these delays are common for construction

STEP-BY-STEP

projects. In general, delays to the construction timeline can be expected when undertaking a project as large as LGBTQ+-inclusive affordable elder housing.

During construction of these two buildings, SAGE ensured that the architects and the builders used an age-friendly design of the SAGE Centers. It was important for the architects of each building to center age-friendly design in the physical infrastructure of each building. Fine motor, physical, and cognitive decline must be considered in the long-term design planning of the building. This may include emergency alert systems in common or private spaces; smooth brick and doorway design to prevent fall hazards; well-lit and non-institutional lighting; or shower bars and chairs. Geographic location is also critical and may include walkability and accessibility for wheelchairs, walkers, or mobility support; proximity to essential staples and fresh food; or access to transportation.

"Construction typically takes 18 to 24 months, depending on the size and demands of the building."

Learn more about this area in the [NHI Housing Developer Training](#).

5. Securing Capital Requires Creativity, Flexibility, and Persistence

To close Stonewall House's funding gaps, SAGE and the developer undertook a fundraising campaign focused on government sources, such as the New York City Council, and on private foundations. SAGE and the developer also worked closely with New York State and City elected officials to secure significant financial support. The team was able to secure discretionary funding through the New York City Council, the Harry and Jeanette

"SAGE's NYC housing projects faced last-minute financing gaps."

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Weinberg Foundation, and New York State Homes and Community Renewal (HCR). However, City Council funding was more restrictive and could not be used for landscaping and hard aping, whi h meant that further fundrai ing wa still necessary. SAGE utilized creative and persistent fundraising campaigns through various avenues in order to address the unexpected financial gaps in development.

6. Establish Local Buy-In Every Step of the Way

A residence can also serve the surrounding residents of the community, and engaging these stakeholders as equal partners in the development process is imperative to creating equitable housing.

Stonewall House is located in the Fort Greene community of Brooklyn, a historically Black neighborhood which has been significantly gentrified over the last decades. Local community members were weary of the impact of another new, tall housing development in the neighborhood. In response to these concerns, SAGE and our partners worked to build the trust of the community and to learn from the community about their neighborhood desires and needs. SAGE and community partners hosted regular workshops with community members from across Fort Greene to familiarize them with the project

"An important step for inclusive housing is establishing a connection with the neighborhood that the development will most impact."

and to hear concerns from the community. SAGE also worked with Fort Greene elected officials to build trust. The members of the Stonewall tenants' association currently continue to voice their concerns and needs to SAGE and have been integral to trust-building. A vital lesson in this process is to involve community members of the desired development neighborhood well before the actual development process begins.

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7. Comprehensive Service Provision Keeps People Housed

Community hiring for building staff was essential to the projects, and it was required by NYCHA for Stonewall House. This means that as a recipient of SARA funding, SAGE had to adhere to the New York City mandates and give hiring priority to local residents receiving public benefits. Particular lessons emerged from Stonewall House amidst the devastation of the pandemic;

> *"A final step in the lease up phase is to ensure that residents are supported by staff within the building."*

housing staff realized a need to expand social services within the buildings to meet the needs of those residents suffering with mental health challenges, including both SAGE and non-SAGE residents. Limited staff capacity and funding gaps presented challenges to meet the expansive needs of all building residents. As this became more evident, SAGE worked to ensure that social services staff were present in both buildings as well as the SAGE Centers to support both older LGBTQ+ residents and other tenants. During the pandemic, this meant ensuring connections to virtual activities and services and making connections to vital medical services for all residents.

Now, almost three years since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, SAGE is still working to ensure LGBTQ+ residents can access the services they need. In both the Stonewall House and Crotona Pride developments, in-residence SAGE Centers help connect LGBTQ+ tenants to inclusive care and community. Additionally, SAGE's NHI is still actively at work to support the development of LGBTQ+-inclusive affordable elder housing across the country with these lessons learned in mind. Culturally informed, thorough service provision that addresses the cognitive, physical, mental, and aging health needs of tenants is an essential component in keeping people safely housed in this comprehensive model of housing.

STEP-BY-STEP

Additional Development Resources

Are you interested in learning more about the process of developing LGBTQ+-inclusive, affordable senior housing? If so, you can access the NHI Training Modules or the NHI Toolkit to learn more about inclusive housing for LGBTQ+ elders.

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Keep these rules of thumb in mind while you're
moving step-by-step through the LGBTQ+-
affirming affordable housing development process.

1	Engage the community from ideation onwards.	
2	Internal and external partnership building is crucial.	
3	Understand the potential timing of site acquisition.	
4	Construction takes time and intentional design.	
5	Securing capital requires creativity, flexibility, and persistence.	
6	Establish local buy-in every step of the way.	
7	Comprehensive service provision keeps people housed.	

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

SAGE deeply appreciates the generous support from The Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation in archiving our housing development process. We hope this document provides historical knowledge which will inform future LGBTQ-friendly housing development, increasing community building and assessment strategies, and addressing challenges met along the process.

The Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation