The Activist Academy is designed and coordinated by IGLYO with logistical support from our member organisation rede ex aequo.

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THE ACTIVIST ACADEMY

The Activist Academy is one of IGLYO’s flagship projects and it directly works towards accomplishing its first strategic objective to build and empower young activists.

There are a series of elements that make this event a unique opportunity for introspection, personal development and empowerment of young LGBTQI people at the beginning of their activist careers. These elements will be highlighted further on in this report and IGLYO is keen on learning from previous editions and improving on how it implements these elements.

The programme consisted of group building activities, a menu of skills-based workshops led by experts from the international LGBTQI movement [All Out, ILGA Europe & rede ex aequo] and IGLYO’s own trainers, and a series of group challenges to practise the skills they had learnt. Some of the significant elements that differentiate between the Academy format and other international youth conferences/trainings included:

- participants navigate throughout the event in smaller teams
- trained mentors to support the participant teams
- almost half of the event focused on practising skills
- relevant institutional partners as workshop facilitators
- structured learning tracking tools and strategies to help participants internalise the learning
2019: THREE YEARS IN THE MAKING

The third edition of the Activist Academy took place between 22-27 July 2019, in Coimbra, Portugal. It was co-organised with IGLYO’s member organisation rede ex aequo.

The third-year format was expanded based on the feedback from the 2018 participants. The most significant change to the Academy programme and content was the addition of another day. Switching from a 5-day format to a 6-day event allowed the Academy to respond to the need for the participants to build more significant connections with each other in a structured way. Therefore, the additional day included a world-café format which facilitated peer-exchanges of good practices and allowed participants to ask specific questions from their peers.

Other changes were also based on the feedback received from previous graduates of the Academy. The time that the participants had to work on the group challenges was extended so that participants could feel less pressure to accomplish the tasks.
PROMOTION

Part of the success of the Activist Academy is due to its distinct branding and aspirational promotion campaign. In 2019, IGLYO refreshed the Activist Academy website with a new colour theme and a series of current photos and graphics. During April, IGLYO launched the call for participants with a new short film, with photos and quotes from last year’s participants.

Over June and July, IGLYO continued to promote the Academy through a series of graphics and posts on social media to build excitement and increase awareness of the event, highlighting workshop experts, mentors and participants.
THE PEOPLE: PARTICIPANTS, MENTORS, EXPERTS & ORGANISERS

People who become part of the Activist Academy have the opportunity to go through different layers of transformative learning experiences: some of them participate in skills workshops and take part in practice challenges; others provide mentorship and support to the participants, and all learn from inspiring experts. This edition of the Activist Academy brought together twenty-two participants, five mentors, five workshop experts, and five organisers. The people involved in the Academy have their bios on the Academy’s website: www.activist-academy.org.

Participants

A call for applications to participate was launched on both the Academy and IGLYO websites, and on social media channels. At the same time, an email addressed to the leadership of IGLYO’s member organisations was sent out, inviting them to start a process to identify key young people with potential for growth within the organisations encouraging them to apply. The participatory process of organisations identifying an activist who would apply to become a participant in the Activist Academy was an important new element in the selection of participants. IGLYO wants this learning opportunity to have the maximum possible impact to the benefit of its member organisations and this is why applicants who were able to show that they had been working with their organisations for a strategic participation to the Academy were considered primarily. 25 participants were selected and invited to attend. Three participants had to cancel at short notice, so it was no longer possible to replace them, reducing the total number of participants to 22.

An additional challenge was raised by the fact that two of the participants had major language barriers which had not been highlighted in the application process. In order to avoid missing learning opportunities, some special arrangements had to be made, including assigning one of the two participants to a mentor who could speak their language. The mentor agreed to try to interpret as much as possible. Despite the best efforts from these participants, there were times when their contributions to their team work was made difficult. Even if some of the team members expressed some frustration that they were not able to communicate properly with their team mate, this was a valuable learning opportunity in itself, as the teams had to come up with specific strategies to include their colleagues, and this is something that is likely to happen many times during their international activist work.
Mentors

IGLYO recruited a team of five mentors who took part in a two-day training prior to the Academy. This year ten previous participants (50%) applied for the position of mentor, which is another indication of the Academy’s success and the enthusiasm of participants not only to return and share their knowledge, but to develop their skills further through these higher level positions.

The mentor’s role is similar to that of a camp counsellor. Each mentor had a team of four or five participants and their main function was to motivate and support their team as well as guiding the learning of individual participants. The mentors played an important role especially during the team challenges and activities. They were trained and instructed to not take a leadership role but rather observe and support the group process so that naturally occurring roles were able to emerge within each team. In order to build on the experience of the previous edition of the Academy, the mentors were recruited from among the last year’s Academy graduates, which provided them with a significant follow-up experience and it also enriched the experience of participants being assisted by previous Academy participants. It was interesting that, this year that some participants expressed frustration that the mentors had not become even more involved while the teams were working on completing the skill challenges. However, this mostly happened in teams where natural leadership roles took longer to emerge and the participants felt that their mentor could have easily fulfilled that role. The mentors were specifically instructed to stand back from becoming the leaders of the teams, especially considering that this is something that the participants expected from them.

Workshop Experts

IGLYO designed the skills curriculum of the Academy based on direct observations during other IGLYO events, and on a thorough analysis of the applications for participation, including not just direct questions for relevant content but also looking at participants’ plans for their professional future after the Academy. After building the skills curriculum of the Academy, IGLYO began to search for workshop facilitators. This year, for the third time since the first edition, the Director of ALL OUT conducted the workshop on online campaigning. ILGA-Europe was represented with a workshop of community-centered strategizing. A Portuguese expert from the organisation rede ex aequo conducted a workshop on working with education systems and two organisers from IGLYO delivered workshops on film-making, public speaking and workshop design and facilitation.

Organisers

IGLYO’s Programmes Manager, Executive Director, and a member from the board were joined by a board member and volunteer from rede ex aequo to make up the organising team. The local volunteer also had the chance to participate fully in the activities of the Academy. As well as overseeing the logistics of the event, the organising team was responsible for running daily check in sessions with the mentors to discuss any particular issues with participants and gather general feedback about the participants’ experiences, devising and running the team challenges at the beginning and end of the event, and coordinating the awards ceremony. In addition, two of the organisers acted as workshop experts.
THE PROGRAMME

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Based on feedback from the 2018 participants, an additional day was added to the programme to allow time for the participants to learn more about each other’s organisations and discuss common themes in their work and to reduce the intensity of the team trials by holding them over two days rather than one.

The program was designed to ensure the following outcomes:

- Increased skill
- Improved self-confidence
- Greater experience of team working and group processes
- Experience of behaviour enhancing processes, such as competition and collaboration
- Strengthened links between organisations and personal connections across the group
- Increased motivation to be engaged in the international LGBTQI movement
D A Y  1

Introducing the Academy

The first activity of the programme aimed to create a relaxed atmosphere and encourage the participants to get to know each other. This was followed by going through the Academy agenda, its aims and objectives and the group ground-rules. The participants had the opportunity to express their expectations from the event and, using techniques typical of motivational interviewing, the participants made individual commitments and expressed personal barriers which would deter them from reaching their individual objectives, as well as identifying group strategies that could help them overcome these barriers. This activity was the first from a series of exercises throughout the week with the higher goal to guide participants through a process of self-analysis and personal growth.

Activist Academy Initiation Challenge

For the initiation challenge, participants were divided into their smaller teams, assigning them to a mentor and have them complete exercises with the goal to create a sense of team identity and to facilitate participants getting to know each other.

After an initial introduction, the participants discovered their smaller teams and were given the Initiation Challenge, a list of tasks to accomplish within a set time. Before going through the tasks, the team members introduced themselves to each other and created an identity for their team, as well as starting to discuss their individual and group expectations from the Academy and how they would each contribute to its success, before starting to go through the tasks. The tasks included, for example: making a short video about activism, and taking a series of creative photos. At the end of the exercise, the teams met in plenary and presented some of their videos and their team identity to the others. Some of their outputs are included below:

Videos:

https://drive.google.com/open?id=1OHQuNixCHTDaqIda7diOf5fTD_c5ie9m
https://drive.google.com/open?id=1KV37EoxpUKxLjm89xOZ05B-t2izbkwR
https://drive.google.com/open?id=1bKGmHDSUenYw4tddpduix_fkh79gldDU
https://drive.google.com/open?id=1z6MLB8c0K6qFCik9GaMacFIHDYGAIa
https://drive.google.com/open?id=1T225S38ErPlD7gGowvPjvNySwUPCqWKB
Team Talks

At the end of the day, the small teams met with their mentor for a reflective activity. During this time, participants also completed their individual Learning Diary, a tool designed to help participants capture their development, focusing on desired behavioural changes post-Academy and track their personal progress throughout the week. Then, within their small teams, under the guidance of their mentors, participants share and discuss answers to the questions in the Learning Diary, collectively focusing on important highlights of the day and on positive changes resulting from the day’s content. The Learning Diary was simplified to give the participants a stronger sense that it is indeed a diary rather than a data collection tool. The guiding questions in the Learning Diary were re-designed to follow the sequence of Gibb’s Reflective Model of Debrief and the mentors had been trained to structure all debrief conversations based on this model. This was emphasised in order to really focus the participants on the impact of their learning and the changes that can happen as a result of learning, rather than have them focus simply on basic reactions of liking and disliking the Academy experiences.
DAY 2 & 3

The second and third day of the Academy were dedicated to the skills workshops facilitated by the experts representing partner institutions. Each workshop lasted three hours, which allowed for detailed presentations, discussions and practice time, preparing the participants for the challenges they would take on during the following days. Participants had the possibility to choose between two or three different workshops each session, so that each participant attended a total number of four workshops over the two days.

Working with education systems [rede ex aequo]

Nick Cassam from rede ex aequo, Portugal, facilitated a workshop sharing the decade's worth of organisational experience of bringing LGBTQI topics to schools. During this time, the response from education authorities at central and local levels, school administrations and teaching staff, has changed considerably, thanks to the smart strategies used by rede ex aequo. The workshop allowed the participants to share their own localised experienced of working with schools and education systems and highlight effective tools, strategies and resources to counteract resistance.

Community-based Strategising [ILGA-Europe]

Bjorn Van Roozendael, ILGA-Europe's Programmes Director facilitated a workshop guiding participants to explore strategising initiatives, with a solid basis in community consultation and involvement, especially in a context where there are too many issues and too few resources to address all. The workshop discussed the concepts of change, intentional change, vision and designing vision, needs assessments and community leadership.

Online Campaigning & Fundraising [All Out]

Matt Beard, the Executive Director of All Out, delivered a workshop on online fundraising, communications and campaigning with the goal to provide participants some practical insights into current best practices around online fundraising, communications and campaigning. The workshop focused on digital fundraising and digital advocacy and used the global All Out platform as a practical example of how attention, interest, support and funding can be crowdsourced by LGBTQI activists from around the world.
Public Speaking [IGLYO]

The workshop on public speaking equipped participants with techniques to deliver more effective public speeches. Participants practised constructing persuasive messages and delivering speeches so that they would become more effective activists in their communities. The workshop was based on Monroe’s Motivated Sequence format, an easy but effective frame of persuasion which is used successfully in many public speeches as well as presenting examples from famous speeches on LGBTQI topics.

Workshop Design and Facilitation [IGLYO]

Tudor Kovacs, IGLYO’s Programmes Manager, conducted a workshop on workshop design and facilitation. Quite a large part of LGBTQI activism is working in schools, having presentations and workshops with students on sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, genders and sex characteristics. LGBTQI activists conduct workshops and trainings with members of professional groups, such as education staff, health service providers, law enforcement, members of the press, etc. This workshop provided the participants with a solid theory basis [the frames of the Experiential Learning Theory, Kolbe, and the 4mat Session plan, Mccarthney], that will enable them to design workshops addressing the needs of every learners’ type and any level of individual motivation. At the same time, it offered a list of facilitation trips and tricks, and strategies on how to manage groups of learners or participants.

Film Making [IGLYO]

Euan Platt, IGLYO’s Executive Director, facilitated the workshop on film making as a tool for raising awareness and storytelling. The workshop began by reviewing several civil society film campaigns to identify the techniques used and analyse their effectiveness. This exercise also helped participants think about different film formats and the strengths and weaknesses of each. The session continued with some practical experience, getting the participants to film short clips, thinking about framing, lighting and sound. The workshop concluded with an introduction to an online film editing programme and a mini challenge for each group to create a one minute film, using the learning from the workshop.
Networking

This day was added to the Academy programme in response to consistent feedback from previous editions’ graduates and it was dedicated to participants building meaningful professional connections, by sharing good practices and being able to provide mutual peer-support to professional challenges.

Intersex Q&A

The participants’ needs assessment highlighted a strong level of interest in Intersex Issues, at the same time with some knowledge gaps, especially about current Intersex activism trends and the best ways to be an ally and advocate to intersex people. One of the Academy participants graciously agreed to be a spokesperson for the intersex community of activists and facilitated a one-hour session of personal stories and questions and answers. Although short, this session was highly valued by the participants.

World café of good practices

For the rest of the morning, participants attended smaller simultaneous conversation meetings around the following topic areas:
- working directly with LGBTQI community members [outreach, services, community building, support groups]
- working with the wider society [campaigns, visibility, prides, media]
- working with decision makers [public policy, lobby, advocacy, parliament]
- working with service providers: education, [mental health, law enforcement (workshops, presentations, trainings]
- research [surveys, focus groups, analysis, exploring topics]
- organisational development [HR projects, governance, internal policies, diversity work, volunteer management]

Participants had the chance to move around these topics, sit and share their relevant experiences with other participants, while guided by questions meant to point their attention to information that can facilitate peer-learning. This activity was completely new to the Academy format and it was highly evaluated by participants, based on their feedback at the end of the event. It was also suggested that this session should be longer and allow for sufficient time for participants to attend more than just one or two topic-based discussions.

The day concluded with the Introduction of the Team Trials, which is the main section of the Academy that provides the participants with the opportunity to directly practice the skills they were exposed to during the expert workshops. In addition to another layer of learning, made up of practising skills such as: negotiation, team work, debating, compromising, decision making, strategizing, prioritizing, conflict resolution, etc. In the previous editions of the Academy, this happened at the beginning of the following day but this change gave the participants more time to complete their challenges/trials (one day and a half, versus just one day, as in the previous years). While the participants had more time this way, this presented a new challenge, namely managing time effectively and planning, which some of the participants struggled with, but overcame successfully, especially with the help from their mentors.
DAY 5

Activist Academy Team Trials

During Day 5, the participants went on to practising the skills they learned during the previous two days. The practice time was framed as a competition between teams. Each team had to complete four challenges over the course of the day to put their learning into action. The challenges were designed to incorporate the application of skills into simulated real-life contexts. After working on the challenges, each team had to present and demonstrate it to the Academy panel of judges. If the Judges felt they had completed it to a high standard, the team could move on to working to the next challenge. If not, the team was required to work a little more on the task. The judges provided detailed feedback and encouragement on the teams’ work on each of the challenges. As well as presenting the challenges to the judges, the teams were told that they had to plan how they would present each of the challenges to the full group on the final day.

The mentors took on a facilitation/co-ordination role to ensure the team effectively used its time and members well. Mentors were able to help with challenges, but had to step back until asked specifically by the team. They also provided feedback throughout the process on how the team was functioning and helped with the time management as the teams were working on the challenges through the day.
DAY 6

Team Trials Presentations

During the morning of Day 6, all the Academy teams rotated to present their work on the challenges, from making a film campaign, to delivering a public speech, presenting a plan for a campaign project, and facilitating a workshop. The other participants and the judges scored the presentations and a winning team was awarded a prize during the Awards Ceremony.

Individual & Group Evaluations

Participants filled in an online evaluation survey, as well as participated in a focus group with the goal to provide IGLYO a qualitative assessment on various elements of the Academy.

The Academy Awards Ceremony

An award was given to the team with the highest public score after the presentation of all challenges. Participants had the opportunity to say good bye to the Academy and each other in a ceremony of receiving awards and certificates and taking group photos.
TEAM TRIALS PRODUCTS

Each team of participants had to complete four tasks: produce a short film, create an online campaign, design and facilitate a 15 minute workshop activity, and write and deliver a public speech, all with themes relevant to LGBTQI youth issues and activism. Below are some examples of the products the participants made:
PARTICIPANT EVALUATIONS

22 participants responded to a real-time online self-assessment on the most important skills and behavioral predictor outcomes of the Academy: confidence, motivation, broadened perspective and international networking as an activist, workshop design, public speaking, campaigning, video making, self-confidence, desire, Intent, self-efficacy, as well as the desire to recommend the Academy to peers.
Overall
Overall perceptions of the Academy were very positive (the learning opportunity, the connections and friendships with people, the organization) with notes around the wish for more free time, the intensity and the too frequent changes in the schedule.

Format
The participants expressed appreciation especially for the workshops (some participants said they were the best they ever attended), for the networking opportunity, for the chance to build motivation and skills, for the constructive feedback given by the judges on the first presentation of the challenges, with notes around the time dedicated to the challenges completion (even if the 2019 Academy had significantly more time dedicated to the challenges, quite a few participants expressed the need for more time, which points to the time management challenge), the competition element which some participants found demotivating, the need for more Academy time.

Logistics
The participants expressed appreciation for the communications given before the event even if it should have come a little earlier, for the hotel but less so for the vegan food options and generally would have liked some organized sightseeing trips or activities, and a more central location for easier transfers.

People
Participants expressed a lot of appreciation for the mentors and the workshop experts, but also for the overall group of people present at the Academy. They acknowledged the difficulty of being assigned to work in a team with people that they might not have an immediate fondness for, and also suggested that one of the judges needed to work on their feedback to ensure it was constructive.
STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES 2018 -2020

Building young activists
To work directly with young people to build their confidence and abilities, and equip them with lifelong skills to become leaders within the LGBTQI and wider human rights movements.

To widen young people’s perspectives and build international solidarity through peer learning, cross-cultural exchange and intersectional approaches.

To provide young people with opportunities to explore and express their individuality in a safe and supportive environment;

To grow a strong and diverse group of youth allies to support and advocate for the human rights of LGBTQI youth.

Increasing the visibility and highlighting the diversity of LGBTQI youth identities
To change attitudes in society and influence decision makers on all levels by ensuring LGBTQI young peoples’ voices and experiences are present, heard and affirmed.

To support and promote positive youth role models within the LGBTQI population and celebrate their diversity.

To ensure youth perspectives are included within the wider LGBTQI movement and that LGBTQI perspectives are mainstreamed within the youth movement.

To embed intersectional approaches throughout our own and our members’ work to ensure diversity within our movement is visible and actively recognised.

Making education safe and inclusive for all
To ensure safe and inclusive educational environments for all LGBTQI young people by working with our members, governments, experts, teachers, parents, and learners.

To raise awareness of the issues faced by LGBTQI youth in education through innovative campaigns and resources.

Developing and sustaining an engaged and connected network of member organisations
To support the work of IGLYO’s members, especially around youth engagement and development.

To encourage international co-operation and increased partnership work across the network through international meetings and online platforms.

To support younger organisations and groups to develop through mentorship and advice.
IGLYO - The International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer & Intersex (LGBTQI) Youth & Student Organisation - is the largest LGBTQI youth and student network in the world with over 97 member organisations in 40 countries, with an estimated reach of over 10,000 youth activists.

As a youth development organisation, IGLYO builds the confidence, skills and experience of LGBTQI young people to become leaders within the LGBTQI and human rights sectors. Through cross-cultural exchange and peer learning, IGLYO also creates a powerful collective of youth activists across Europe and beyond, who can share strategies and visions, and foster values of international solidarity. Finally, IGLYO ensures the voices and experiences of LGBTQI young people are present and heard by decision-makers at European and international levels. IGLYO achieves these outcomes through international trainings and events, targeted capacity building programmes, inter-cultural exchanges and peer learning, online tools and resources, and digital story-telling and campaigning.