

Case Study of Rainbow Faith and Freedom: How One 2SLGBTQIA+-Serving Nonprofit Responds to Online Hate

Learning Objectives

In this module, you'll learn about how one 2SLGBTQIA+-serving nonprofit, Rainbow Faith and Freedom (RFF), deals with online hate. This module was developed from a webinar RFF did with ODLAN in which they outline their approach to online hate. We'll go through how they identify online hate, why they've seen online hate increasing, and different approaches they take to addressing anti-2SLGBTQIA+ online hate. In the next module, we'll provide you with some guidance on developing your own plan for dealing with anti-2SLGBTQIA+ online hate, so we hope the example from RFF helps you think through how your organization could respond to online hate. The solutions RFF has come up with may not be the best approach for your organization, but we hope there are things you can learn from their experience, whether you want to adopt some of their practices or take a completely different approach.

Content Warning

This module includes generalized descriptions of racist, misogynist, and anti-2SLGBTQIA+ online hate, as well as discussion of how religious beliefs are used to justify anti-2SLGBTQIA+ hate.

We encourage you to move on to the next module if engaging with this material doesn't feel like the right thing for you.

If you decide to continue with the module and need support, you can find resources in our resources section at the end of this module.

Determining What Online Hate Is

Before deciding how your organization will respond to online hate, it can be useful to agree on a definition of what online hate is to you.

RFF takes a "we know it when we see it" approach to identifying online hate. Examples of online content that RFF considers to be online hate include slurs, disrespectful language, angry tirades, name calling, and racist, homophobic, transphobic, and/or misogynist messaging.

Why Has RFF Seen an Increase in Online Hate?

RFF saw an increase in anti-2SLGBTQIA+ online hate after hosting and promoting nationwide and international events and surveys on 2SLGBTQIA+ inclusion in faith-based communities. RFF boosted posts to promote events, surveys, and reports, which exposed them to a larger audience than their usual followers. RFF promotes their posts to targeted audiences, such as those interested in LGBTQ+ issues, human rights, and #CanQueer, as well as those interested

in faith-based terms like Christianity. RFF reported that bots also include these terms in their interests so that they can target organizations like RFF.

As we mentioned in the last module, this was a trend we saw in the responses from 2SLGBTQIA+ nonprofit staff from our research project: Online hate targeting 2SLGBTQIA+-serving nonprofits tends to increase when their content or work is made visible outside their usual networks (for example when posts are boosted or a public figure talks about their work).

What Does RFF Do When The Organization is Targeted by Anti-2SLGBTQIA+ Online Hate?

RFF's approach is guided by their mission: "Working to inspire faith communities and families to be safe places for LGBTI people by changing the hearts and minds of individuals around the world." Because changing hearts and minds is a central part of RFF's work, they try to engage in conversation and educate others when possible, though they recognize that the initial instinct can often be to simply block the user and delete the content. Additionally, RFF knows that if someone is taking the time to share hate on their channels, they are likely doing it to others as well, so if RFF has the opportunity to soften them in some way, they love to take that opportunity because of the snowball effect it can have.

Despite the importance of education to their work, RFF knows it's not always possible to engage with users who are sharing anti-2SLGBTQIA+ content. So, RFF takes two approaches to online hate, depending on the content: they either engage with the user or ignore and delete the content and block the user. Which approach they take is determined by the tone, content, potential for the content to trigger other users, and the level of threat in the message.

Reflection

Are there parts of your organization's mission, vision, and/or values that you think could guide your approach to anti-2SLGBTQIA+ online hate?

Approach 1: Engage

If RFF decides there is an opportunity to engage with someone who posts anti-2SLGBTQIA+ content, they approach the user by trying to open up a conversation rather than engaging aggressively. Here are some examples of responses:

"We're sorry to hear you feel that way. If you'd like to learn more about our mission and why we exist, please feel free to visit our website."

"Thank you for sharing your feedback with us. It seems you may have misunderstood who we are – we are not a church/mosque/synagogue but a charitable organization attempting to make faith-based institutions safe and welcoming places for the 2SLGBTQ+ community. Here are some of our resources..."

Approach 2: Do Not Engage

If RFF decides not to engage with a comment, there are a few options they choose between. The level of anger and hate in the comment determines which option they choose.

1. Ignore: Leave the comment where it is for user conversation (they use this option mostly for faith-based comments)
2. Delete and Ignore: Remove the comment and take no further actions (they do this when the content is offensive but not violent)
3. Delete and Block: Remove the content and block or ban the user from future interactions (they use this option when they've determined the user's comments or tone have gone beyond what RFF considers to be acceptable or when the user has made multiple hateful comments)
4. Report: Remove the content and report the incident/user to the platform (RFF uses this option for violent or aggressive comments)

Want to hear more about RFF's experiences with anti-2SLGBTQIA+ online hate? You can find their webinar on the topic in our resources section.

Reflection

What do you think of RFF's approach to online hate? Are there aspects of RFF's approach that you think would work well for your organization? Are there things you think your organization should do differently?

What Other Options Are There For Responding to Anti-2SLGBTQIA+ Online Hate?

Interested in seeing other models of responding to anti-2SLGBTQIA+ online hate? Check out Alok Menon's Instagram, where they post beautiful responses to the racist and transmisogynist online hate they are subjected to.

Mental Health Resources

1. TransLifeline | Trans Lifeline provides trans peer support | (877) 330-6366 (operates 24/7)
2. Réseau ACCESS Network | Sudbury, Ontario | Provides: Case Management, Counseling, Psychiatric Services and more for ALL age groups | 705.688.0500 or 1.800.465.2437
3. CAYR Community Connections | Newmarket, Ontario | Provides: Crisis support services, Harm Reduction and more | 1-800-243-7717 | Off Business Hours Support Line - 1-855-310-COPE (2673); or 905-953-5412

4. Sexual Health Infoline Ontario (SHILO) | free and anonymous counseling services for ALL Canadians | 1-800-668-2437 (Mon-Fri 10 a.m. – 10:30 p.m.; Weekends 11 a.m. – 3 p.m.)

5. Toronto PFlag | Provides: Confidential Support Line for ALL ages | open 9AM-9PM 7 days a week | 416-406-637

Resources

Rainbow Faith and Freedom's webinar on their approach to anti-2SLGBTQIA+ online hate:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ktldvojPCF0>

Alok Menon's Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/alokvmenon/>

Examples:

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CvsoP5uu-5/>

<https://www.instagram.com/p/Ct9Oc0uu7x/>

<https://www.instagram.com/p/Cs1TuH5OkZD/>