Rural LGBTQ+ Power and Belonging Fellowship

FELLOWSHIP ANNOUNCEMENT AND INFORMATION
Do you dream of rural, intergenerational, multiracial, cross-class gatherings with all of your neighbors? Where you’re laughing together and talking about how good the food is AND how to equitably share and access resources, or how to approach local schools’ emerging books bans? Are you longing for gatherings where you feel safe discussing what’s happening in your community and like you belong in the work of figuring out what to do about it together?

Out in the Open, a multiracial grassroots organization focused on building the power of rural LGBTQ+ people, is launching a pilot cohort of our Rural LGBTQ+ Power and Belonging (RLPB) Fellowship focused on moving us closer to that vision. This is the first of three rounds of this Fellowship we’ll host before the end of 2024.

The RLPB Fellowship is an opportunity for adults who identify as LGBTQ+ and who are currently residing in rural Waldo or Penobscot counties of Penobscot Territory/Maine. We especially encourage applications from people who are 55+ years old, BIPOC, working class/poor, trans women and femmes, and/or living with a disability.

This first RLPB Fellowship cohort will gather monthly (including two overnight retreats) to share stories, learn, collaborate, and strategize about connecting with neighbors, moving through community tensions, and building effective movements in their towns.

During the Fellowship we will focus on:
- Movement building in rural areas
- Relationship building
- Communication practices
- Racial justice in rural areas
- Responsive learning and facilitation - ie: how to be flexible and prioritize attendee needs within a hosted gathering
- The role of art and culture in building movements
- Rural BIPOC experiences
- Cross class conversations
• LGBTQ+ identity
• Safety planning and seeking support from your neighbors

Our experiences in the rural communities we call home tell stories of interdependence and reliance on each other. This is in contrast to national narratives that we are divided. RLPB Fellowships are intended to cultivate interconnectedness and are a step towards building a powerful network of mutuality, safety, belonging, and positive social and cultural change. We believe that rural LGBTQ+ people have a central role to play in moving all people and our communities towards a collectively liberated and connected future, and away from divisive culture wars that are sparked against our shared needs and interests.

What we talk about and do within the RLPB Fellowship gatherings will primarily be informed by participants’ input and needs. Facilitation will be led by Out in the Open staff, guest experts, and possibly by cohort participants as they pilot their own ideas and projects. Out in the Open will also be hosting community-based events related to the RLPB Fellowship and Network in surrounding communities during the cohort timeline, such as a Bean Supper, which will be opportunities for cohort participants to practice skills, collaborate, meet people, and have fun!

Varying amounts and kinds of experience from applicants are welcome and is something we’re looking for when thinking about choosing a group of participants. The RLPB Fellowship will be an ongoing group experience, so we’re also looking for people who are interested in building relationships within the cohort. There will be 10 participants in this pilot cohort.

**BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION**

Connection with other LGBTQ+ people nearby who are thinking about and working towards social and cultural change in rural places

• Space to develop organizing and communication skills
• A supportive place to practice and process without being canceled!
• Deepen your connection with Out in the Open
• Gain skills, tools, and resources to use during the Fellowship and beyond
• Financial support for childcare and transportation while participating in Fellowship activities
• Food and lodging while participating in Fellowship activities
• A $1750 participation stipend for completing the Fellowship
• And up to $500 for each participant, in addition to the participation stipend, to use in putting on a community event (more details below), as well as on-going staff support to help the event succeed.

OUT IN THE OPEN | [http://www.WeAreOutintheOpen.org](http://www.WeAreOutintheOpen.org)
@WeAreOutintheOpen | 207.808.0623
OITO will coordinate stipends with Fellowship participants. Infants-in-arms are welcome throughout.

**EXPECTATIONS OF FELLOWSHIP PARTICIPANTS**

- Attend in-person gatherings with your cohort, to learn, build relationships, and gain support to develop public community events.
  - Including two weekend-long in-person retreats (September or October 2023 and February 2024) and 5 hours of in-person time each month, that may be broken out into one or more gatherings, in August, September or October, November, December, and January.
- Conceive of, coordinate, and host a public gathering in the community where you live that supports the RLPB Fellowship’s overall goals of increasing feelings of connection and belonging throughout your community, makes spaces for neighborly relationships to begin and/or grow, and moves our communities closer to creating positive change together, by January 2024.
  - OITO will offer up to $500 for each participant, as mentioned above, in addition to the participation stipend, to use in putting on your event, as well as on-going staff support to help the event succeed.
  - Planning and coordination of your community events will require additional time, aside from cohort gatherings. (there will also be time within cohort gatherings to work on events)
  - Engage with other cohort participants to debrief after public events are held, through a presentation or other type of sharing.
- Providing feedback and input to Out in the Open towards improving the next RLPB Fellowship offering is an aspect of this pilot cohort, and is a part of the compensation for participation.
- If accepted, Fellowship participants will need to take a PCR-level COVID-19 test on-site prior to each in-person cohort gathering, and mask as-needed depending on the group needs.
  - Out in the Open will provide LAMP nasal-swab tests and PPE for all attendees.

**APPLICATION DETAILS**

- Application materials can be previewed online at [http://www.weareoutintheopen.org](http://www.weareoutintheopen.org)
  - There is an online application form and PDF download that may be mailed.
- Applications open June 5, 2023 and close July 14, 2023 (please note, this is a new, extended deadline).
• Applicants will be notified by July 21 and required to confirm their participation by July 28.
• The group will meet in late August to kick off the six month cohort.

Virtual info sessions are scheduled for Friday June 2 at 9:00 a.m, Thursday June 8 at 5 p.m., and Monday June 19 at 12 p.m., and Wednesday July 5 at 5 p.m. You can register for an info session at http://www.weareoutintheopen.org/powerandbelonging

Arrangements to meet at other times and to talk in-person are possible! Please reach out to Grace via phone or email to coordinate: 207.808.0623, grace@WeAreOutintheOpen.org

**COHORT TIMELINE**

**Late May**: Cohort announced, info session held online and offer in-person meeting offered to discuss

**June**: Open applications, 2nd info session held online and in-person meetings offered to discuss

**Mid July**: Application closes; Participants selected and notified

**Late July**: Obtain confirmation from participants, get W-9’s signed and returned, send out some initial resources/readings/etc for discussion

**August 25 [TBD, ME/Penobscot Territory]**: For initial 3 - 5 hour session to meet and build trust and connection; includes lunch, an excursion/activity

**September 19 - 21 [Seal Cove, ME/Penobscot & Passamaquoddy Territory]**: Overnight retreat! Deeper relationship building among the group, shared work, creative process and planning, skill sharing.*

**October 26, 27 or 28 [TBD, ME/Penobscot Territory]**: 5 hour session, maybe meeting twice for 2 hours in smaller groups or on differing topics/issues/with various purposes*

**November 16, 17, or 18 [TBD, ME/Penobscot Territory]**: 5 hour session, maybe meeting twice for 2 hours in smaller groups or on differing topics/issues/with various purposes
December: No gathering, participants can connect in smaller groups or one on one with staff to support their process and learning.

January 18, 19, or 20 [TBD, ME/Penobscot Territory]: 5 hour session, maybe meeting twice for 2 hours in smaller groups or on differing topics/issues/with various purposes

February 16 - 18 [TBD, ME/Wabanaki Territory]: Overnight retreat! Presentations and debrief about community projects, what next, reflection and connection.