



Our Story of Change

What does Pride mean?

As Pride organizers, we know more than anyone that there is no one answer. We hear what Pride means to you throughout the year - whether it be through the appreciation sent after an event, a response to a controversial stance, or conversation about our plans for the future.

Pride is both protest and party, critical and celebratory. Pride is honouring our roots, commemorating our wins, and imagining queer possibilities of the future. Pride is taking a breath to live in the moment - joyous, unapologetic, and taking up space in a world that says we should not exist.

The debate over the meaning and role of Pride Parades is older than the Parade itself. Before there was Stonewall, there was the Annual Reminder. Silent homophile activists adhered to formal dress codes -dresses for women, jackets and ties for men- while picketing outside Independence Hall in Philadelphia for gay rights. These activists worked to change the perception that homosexuals were deviant through presenting themselves as “respectable” members of society. While we might debate the effectiveness of these tactics today, these brave people took massive personal risks in the hopes they could create a safer world.

The fifth Annual Reminder happened one week post-Stonewall. This time, many demonstrators departed from the dress code and well-mannered march to hold hands and show affection towards their same-sex partners. Radical activists who were not captivated by the assimilationist tactics of the homophile movement formed organizations like the Gay Liberation Front to fight the culture which harmed not only gays and lesbians, but also oppressed women, people of colour, and the economically disadvantaged. There was a new vision for gay activism, and new tactics were needed. So, in November 1969, organizers began planning what would one day be known as the first Pride Parades.

Tensions over the meaning and purpose of Pride existed from these first, early Parades. Should people come out of the closet and use their real names? Should goals be around acceptance or liberation? Should businesses which support the community be included or prohibited? Should the events be disruptive and political or celebratory and joyous? Can they be all these things?

Debates over the purpose of Pride are as much a part of the history and make-up of the Pride Parade as any other aspect of it. It is also not Vancouver Pride's question to answer. We are simply the creators of the container - what Pride means is up to you.

As Pride organizers, the question of what Pride means is less important for us to address than *how we can co-create spaces which enable our communities to participate in ways that are meaningful to them.*

Addressing a Problem

Pride events in North America have historically and contemporarily done a poor job of uplifting and including women, transgender and gender diverse people, Black, Indigenous and People of Colour, Deaf communities, disabled people, sex workers, people in poverty and other folks who are marginalized in ways that intersect with their sexual orientation and gender identity.

This is not to discount the important work done by those who came before us, but to state a truth that must be addressed for Vancouver Pride to move forward.

Recognizing this, Vancouver Pride has engaged in multiple initiatives over the past several years to correct the ways we have excluded members of our communities. Gender parity was added to the Vancouver Pride Society's Bylaws, ensuring that women would be represented in leadership positions. Recognizing the importance of sober spaces at Pride, we began to partner with Clean, Sober, and Proud to produce substance-free parties during Pride Week. Accessible viewing areas were created at Pride events. A designated community partnerships staff position was created in order to support LGBTQAI2S+ serving organizations participation at Pride. Recognizing that Pride can never be everything to everyone, and that there are amazing community organizations putting on events for our communities, this staff role also distributes funds so that those events can continue.

In 2014, the Vancouver Parks Board passed recommendations from Vancouver Pride's Trans and Gender Variant working group which helped increase access at recreation facilities across the city. In 2015, Vancouver Pride introduced Trans Equality Now (T.E.N.) Pledge to amplify the voices of activists who were calling for equal legal protections for transgender and gender-variant Canadians through amending human rights legislation and the criminal code. Parade participants were required to sign the T.E.N. Pledge and affirm their support for trans communities to participate in the Vancouver Pride Parade. Thanks to the tireless work of community activists, Bill C-16 was passed in 2016, adding gender identity and expression to the list of prohibited grounds of discrimination.

A New Team

In 2016, our new staff team was hired. This year marked a shift in the operations at Vancouver Pride Society. For the first time, we were able to employ a team of year-round staff who were dedicated to making systemic change within the organization. This increased capacity enabled us to move beyond the frantic pace of summer event planning. We have put time and resources into critically examining our organization, building and repairing relationships with our communities, and finding ways to remove barriers and increase access across our events and organization.

Listening to Our Communities

In the year between Pride 2016 and 2017, we embarked on a community consultation process and gathered feedback from hundreds of members of our communities. This feedback allowed us to identify the gaps in our planning, learn who we had been excluding and harming, and collect ideas of new paths forward. We facilitated discussions with law enforcement regarding their role in the Pride Parade. In 2017, inspired by the courageous conversations led by our communities, we made the decision to remove uniformed law enforcement, weapons, marked vehicles and sirens from the Vancouver Pride Parade.

Our initial consultation identified the need for more specific feedback and the need to expand our mandate to include advocacy. We continued our community conversations and dedicated funding towards the creation of a new staff position as well as two additional consultations.

In 2019, we hired our new Community Partnerships & QTBIPOC Outreach Coordinator. Our QTBIPOC Outreach Coordinator has led a series of consultations with queer, trans and Two Spirit people who are also Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour. We heard that we need to support QTBIPOC events and further amplify the work organizers are already doing. In response, we have dedicated funding towards QTBIPOC events and initiatives, including the creation of a Two Spirit committee.

In 2019, we also hired Creating Accessible Neighbourhoods (C.A.N.) to conduct accessibility audits of all our events. We chose C.A.N. because of their extensive experience auditing dynamic spaces rather than built environments, and to ensure we were hiring and paying disabled people with lived experience. In addition to auditing our events, C.A.N. has provided Disability Justice and Accessible Event Planning training to our staff, consulting while we design our accessible spaces, volunteer training materials and facilitation for a series of accessibility consultations.

Last year we also took a hard stance against organizations that platform transphobia and homophobia. We affirmed that trans women are women, trans rights are human rights, and organizations that don't stand for all of our community don't have a place marching with our community.

A New Look

One of the updates we have been working on is a brand-new website that is accessible and easy to navigate with all the information you need in one place. As we started to imagine what our new website would look like, we realized it was not just our website that needed a refresh. Our whole image needed an update to match the organization we are becoming. We wanted a look that embraced the celebratory nature of our events and the serious tone of our advocacy.

Over the past few months, we went through a design process to discover a new visual identity that would better reflect the personality of the Vancouver Pride Society. This new design would help to communicate the changes at Vancouver Pride, be inclusive and inviting to our communities, and recognize Vancouver Pride as a world-class organization committed to celebration of and advocacy for LGBTQAI2S+ communities. We started a design discovery process with our board, staff, and members of our communities to better understand how we understood ourselves, and how our community understood us. We learned that Vancouver Pride is viewed as passionate, caring, quirky and sassy and our new image reflects that.

To Rainbow or not to Rainbow....

The decision not to include the rainbow in our new look was a challenging one. Like the Pride Parade, the Pride Flag has a colorful history of contention, change and adaptation. The original rainbow flag, designed by Gilbert Baker in 1978, had eight bands of colour. This was reduced to seven due to the challenge of obtaining hot pink fabric. Later, when attempting to hang the flags from lamp posts in San Francisco's Market Street, the centre stripe was covered by the lamp posts. Yet another stripe was removed for reasons of efficiency, leaving us with the now popular six striped flag which Baker referred to as the "commercial version."

Since then, myriad flags have been designed which represent different aspects of our beautiful community: the transgender flag, lesbian flag, pansexual flag, intersex flag, bisexual flag, asexual flag, agender flag, bear flag, non-binary flag, progress flag, leather pride flag, lipstick lesbian flag, genderqueer flag, Philadelphia flag, genderfluid flag... the list goes on, each of these symbols important and dear to the communities they represent. How could we capture the diversity of our communities by singling out just one?

Rather than embracing a flag that represents just one segment of our community, we have instead adopted a bold and bright look that speaks to who we are as an organization: passionate, caring, quirky, sassy, and ready to grow in 2020 and beyond. But don't worry - while our brand colours don't include a rainbow flag, we will continue to fly the flags of our communities at our events.

A Commitment

While we are excited about our new look that better reflects our new direction, we know that a brand refresh does not equal tangible change. Creating an organization and events that are more equitable, anti-racist, low barrier and accessible takes time, resources, and the willingness to do the work of unpacking your messy history. This is work we have committed to, put resources towards, and will continue to do. Some of our decisions won't be popular - we are committed to making them, nonetheless. Sometimes we will make mistakes - we are committed to working on our organization, correcting our decisions, and making amends to those we have harmed. We understand this is a work in progress - we are committed to that progress and look forward to releasing updates through the coming months with detailed reports.

We hope that you love our new look as much as we do and will join us in getting excited for our brand-new website coming June 1, 2020! We invite you to continue giving us feedback, letting us know what works, what does not, what you love, what you didn't, and what you would like to see going forward. We will continue to host consultations with our communities, offer opportunities to give feedback post-events, and welcome your thoughts at any other time of the year. We want to know how to best make spaces that are meaningful to you - because we plan events, but you make Pride.

A special thank-you to the team at Carter Hales Design Lab who embarked on this journey of change with Vancouver Pride Society.