

# FREEDOM TO MARRY WEEK



## The Resource Guide



February 10 - 16, 2008

[www.freedomtomarry.org](http://www.freedomtomarry.org)

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# Freedom to Marry Week 2008 Resource Guide

**T**hank you for hosting a Freedom to Marry Week event. It is your commitment to eliminating discrimination in marriage that will make the 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Observance of Freedom to Marry Week historic. Through Freedom to Marry Week 2008 we will demonstrate to all of America our commitment to justice and will highlight the love and commitment of families that fuel this movement.

Since 1998, at about the same time every year, hundreds of events ranging from public forums to religious ceremonies have been held throughout the country to call attention to the burgeoning national movement for marriage equality and to ask for support from our non-gay friends and allies. Now we need you to be part of the conversation, joining neighbors in your hometown, February 10 – 16, 2008 to talk about why marriage equality matters to you.

Person to person asks, conversations with those around you, and telling the stories of lesbian and gay couples and their families are the most powerful ways to move the public and policy makers closer to fully supporting marriage equality. Whether you take action individually, organize a small group of friends and family, or work within an existing state or local organization, your efforts will make a difference.

The goal of this resource kit is to provide you with ideas and tools you can use to be an active part of the marriage equality movement during February's focused periods of recognition, and throughout the rest of the year. With anti-gay activists and policy makers at all levels of government working against us, you are the marriage movement's strongest champions. These Freedom to Marry Week events will go a long way to inspiring people across the country to join the marriage equality movement. As we join together, we are mobilizing to protect our rights and advance the freedom to marry. Please know how much everyone in the movement values your individual commitment, hard work, and investment in justice.

Looking forward to Freedom to Marry Week – with you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Evan Wolfson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Evan Wolfson  
Executive Director  
Freedom to Marry

▼▼▼  
ORGANIZING  
▼▼▼

# Where to Find Additional Organizing Materials

In addition to this Resource Guide, please visit [www.FreedomtoMarry.org](http://www.FreedomtoMarry.org) and download the following additional materials to help you plan an action or event and get involved:

Print Materials (you may request additional hard copies of print materials as needed)

- a. [Candidates' Guide on How to Support Marriage Equality and Get Elected](#)
- b. [Marriage Makes a Word of Difference](#)
- c. [Why Non-Gay People Care and What We Can Do About It](#)
- d. [For Richer, For Poorer: The Freedom to Marry as a Matter of Economic Justice](#)
- e. [What is Freedom to Marry?](#)
- f. [Why Marriage?](#)
- g. [Stand Up for Our Constitution](#)
- h. [The Time is Now to Fight for the Freedom to Marry](#)
- i. [Why the Un-American Attacks on So-Called Activist Judges Must Stop](#)
- j. [Marriage Equality and Lessons for the Scary Work of Winning](#)
- k. [The Marriage Resolution](#)
- l. [Open Letter to Religious Leaders on Marriage Equality](#)

# Why It Is So Important to Tell Our Stories

## Sign up to our **Story Center!**

**There is no better way to communicate who we are and the depths of our commitment to our partners and our families than by telling the truth of our lives.**

Our stories help us communicate, in concrete ways, how the denial of marriage harms families. Explain specific incidents of injustice and hardship encountered because due to denial of Social Security, health coverage, respect at work or school, and so on. Feel free to make it as personal as well. For a list of the protections that come with marriage – protections you and your loved ones are deprived of because you can't get married – log on to [www.FreedomtoMarry.org](http://www.FreedomtoMarry.org).

The simple process of story-telling is one way each generation passes on its wisdom. Talk honestly about the importance of equal rights, equal opportunities and basic fairness; connect the dots to how the denial of marriage affects you and others.

**Whether you are gay or non-gay** (for extended families are often hurt as well), make it personal, make it concrete, and make sure you hit home by explaining why marriage matters to you. When our friends and neighbors see real, committed, loving couples building a life together, it helps them come to understand our devotion and commitment.

In addition to your Freedom to Marry Week activities, you may wish to lend your voice and image to the national marriage movement and become one of many voices who understand the urgency of our movement for fairness and equality and who are making themselves available to participate in the ongoing national conversation.

We are thrilled to have an easy way to collect stories, such as yours, from around the country. You are cordially invited to visit the new and improved Story Center, a joint project of Freedom to Marry and the American Civil Liberties Union. We hope you will log on to the Story Center, at [www.FreedomtoMarry.org](http://www.FreedomtoMarry.org), and share your unique story about how discrimination harms you, your partner and/or your family.

Your voice and personal experience can help us spread the word about the hardships we face due to the denial of equal marriage rights. Sharing our stories and showing our faces also helps the rest of America identify with our need to hold ourselves accountable to the promise of liberty, fairness and equality for all. When you submit your story, please consider sharing a photo of either you and your partner or the entire family.

**Log on and share your story today!**

***[www.FreedomtoMarry.org](http://www.FreedomtoMarry.org)***



**We've had to pay thousands of dollars over the years for wills, living wills, durable powers of attorney and even for a 'relationship contract' – all the legal protections money can buy...  
But you can't buy equality.**

*-- Beth Reis and Barbara Steele, together 27 years, have 11 grand-kids and one great-grandson.*

**The Story Center**  
[www.freedomtomarry.org](http://www.freedomtomarry.org)

## Sign on the dotted line, please....

We hope you will visit [www.FreedomtoMarry.org](http://www.FreedomtoMarry.org) and sign the on-line marriage resolution, and that you will ask others to do the same.

We also have provided a copy of the marriage resolution – on the next page – so that you may easily share it with friends, family, elected officials, clergy and others who you would like to ask to definitively commit to the marriage equality movement. When they sign the resolution, please return it to Freedom to Marry via fax or mail.

Also available online is [An Open Letter to Religious Leaders on Marriage Equality](#).

The Open Letter was developed at a colloquium of theologians sponsored by the Religious Institute, an ecumenical, interfaith organization dedicated to advocating for sexual health, education, and justice in faith communities and society, and funded by Freedom to Marry.

“America needs to know that many faith leaders and theologians from diverse religious traditions strongly believe that all people have a God-given right to lead lives which fully express love, mutuality and commitment—including the right to marry,” said the Reverend Debra W. Haffner, director of the Religious Institute.

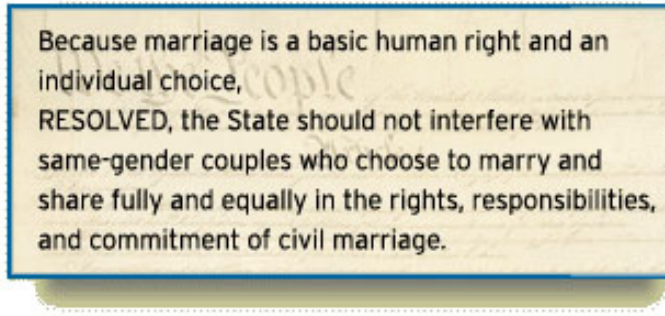
**Endorsements are accepted from ordained clergy, professional religious educators, theologians, and staff of religious institutions.**

Please log on to our website and find these two important additional ways to lend your name and support to the national marriage equality movement, and encourage your family, friends and neighbors to do the same!

**Every voice is valuable to this ongoing national conversation. Contribute yours today!**



# The Marriage Resolution



Because marriage is a basic human right and an individual choice, **RESOLVED**, the State should not interfere with same-gender couples who choose to marry and share fully and equally in the rights, responsibilities, and commitment of civil marriage.

**I/We endorse the Marriage Resolution.** Please feel free to include me/us as a voice in educating the public.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name (please type or print legibly)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Please print name of organization you represent, if applicable

\_\_\_\_\_  
Address

\_\_\_\_\_  
Address

\_\_\_\_\_  
Phone

\_\_\_\_\_  
Fax

\_\_\_\_\_  
E-mail address

\_\_\_\_\_  
Organization's URL/web address, if applicable

**May we add your name and contact information to the Freedom to Marry mailing list?**

Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

**Please fax to Freedom to Marry at 646-375-2069 or mail to:**

**Freedom to Marry  
116 West 23<sup>rd</sup> Street, Suite 500  
New York, NY 10011**

# A Few More Simple Ideas

What can you (and your family, friends and organization) do to recognize Freedom to Marry Week?

- **Simply tell other people** that there is indeed a day and a week set aside to bring awareness to marriage equality. Use this time to initiate and maintain conversations with people about the issue. You may only feel comfortable discussing Freedom to Marry Week with close associates or this may give you just the right opportunity to talk to family, colleagues, neighbors, elected officials or the news media.
- **Ask people to sign up for updates on the marriage equality movement** by joining the list to receive the Freedom to Marry updates at [www.FreedomtoMarry.org](http://www.FreedomtoMarry.org).
- **Write to a newspaper, magazine, television station, radio station or some other media outlet**, urging them to cover marriage equality and, specifically, Freedom to Marry Week/Day. If you can, serve as a resource for them, agreeing to be interviewed, or helping to find people who will talk to a writer or reporter about the subject. Provide the media outlet(s) you contact with information about organizations they might talk to for their coverage of the issue. (*Tips about asking the media to cover this issue, this day and this week are provided on page 21.*)
  - **Write a letter to the editor** of your local paper – or another publication like a union or church newsletter – in support of Freedom to Marry Week/Day. Use the opportunity to positively address recent news coverage of the marriage equality movement. If the publication in question has not carried recent coverage of the topic, you may want to make your letter timelier – and therefore more likely to be published – by mentioning Freedom to Marry Week itself. (*Tips on writing an effective letter to the editor are provided on page 22.*)
  - **Write an article or “op-ed” piece** for your local paper or a publication affiliated with an organization in which you are involved (e.g. – a labor union newsletter, denominational newspaper, etc.). Find out the publication’s guidelines and write about Freedom to Marry Day, what it means to you and why you think it should matter to other people. Your story will help personalize the issue, which always helps others to learn about a subject (even if they think they are opposed!). (*Tips on writing an effective op-ed article are provided on page 23.*)
- **Create a visibility event** in your neighborhood, in your workplace, on campus or within an organization by distributing information about the need for marriage equality
  - **Ask your elected officials, your favorite celebrity, an athlete you admire or other high-profile people to sign the Marriage Resolution and become a Voice of Equality.** That is, a group of leaders who are committed to saying they support marriage equality for same-sex couples. If you have someone in mind to serve as a Voice of Equality, please contact Freedom to Marry, [info@FreedomtoMarry.org](mailto:info@FreedomtoMarry.org).
  - **Ask your elected officials to proclaim Freedom to Marry Day or Freedom to Marry Week** in your city, county or state. Then, tell the news media about the proclamation; make the most of the good news! And, if you live in an area that does not issue such proclamations, ask the county, city or state elected official to at least offer a letter in support of Freedom to Marry Day and Week. If you do secure a proclamation from an elected official, please let Freedom to Marry know ([info@FreedomtoMarry.org](mailto:info@FreedomtoMarry.org)) so we can help publicize your effort.
  - **Organize a “Statehouse Speak Out,”** bringing together your friends and supporters, your organization, community leaders and elected allies, all going on record in favor of marriage equality. Have everyone sign the Marriage Resolution, and at [www.FreedomtoMarry.org](http://www.FreedomtoMarry.org). Or, you may want to create a more public event – on your state Capitol’s front steps, at the Mayor’s office, local

marriage license bureau, or at some other creative location. Invite the media, and then share news of your “Speak Out” with any media that did not attend.

- **Invite the media to an “action”** at the local marriage license office. When same-sex couples apply for a marriage license, it often makes news. Realistically, they will be denied the right to apply for a marriage license. Really make the moment count by using it as a concrete example of the lack of marriage equality. If you have members of the media with you, they can tell the story of efforts toward marriage equality through your personal story. The Metropolitan Community Churches web site, [www.mcccchurch.org](http://www.mcccchurch.org), provides a Freedom to Marry Day Action Kit that may help you organize “actions”.
- **Send a “Valentine” to your elected representatives**, urging them to support marriage equality and asking them to defend against any attempts to amend the U.S. Constitution (or otherwise legislate marriage inequality). If elected officials you know already support marriage equality, send them a Valentine thanking them for that support. Visit the Human Rights Campaign’s web site, [www.hrc.org](http://www.hrc.org), or [www.Congress.org](http://www.Congress.org). Both provide easy ways to contact your elected officials. The latter web site can even help you identify state and local representatives.
- **Host or sponsor a house party**, to which you invite just family and friends to recognize Freedom to Marry Week/Day. Better yet, use your house party as a chance to talk candidly with neighbors, elected officials and members of the media about marriage equality. (*Tips about fun and effective house parties in the section entitled “How to Host a House Party”.*)
- **Engage communities of faith** in Freedom to Marry Week. Religious and spiritual leaders have a special role to play in the marriage equality movement. Ask them to hold a special service for the occasion or to speak out on the subject. Ask your clergy if they will present a sermon or talk or paper on the subject. Help them make your faith community a place for everyone. Make sure your faith community is a source of information on marriage equality for same-sex couples. (*Ideas about engaging communities of faith are provided and sample sermons are available at [www.FreedomtoMarry.org](http://www.FreedomtoMarry.org).*)
- **Support rallies sponsored by other organizations** committed to marriage equality. *Included in this kit is a list of Freedom to Marry’s many partner organizations, as well as information about finding supportive organizations in your state.* Remember that it is not just lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender organizations working for marriage equality; many fine non-gay organizations support your efforts too.

Remember that whatever you do to recognize Freedom to Marry Week, you are initiating conversations that will change hearts and minds, change laws and change lives. You are helping create an environment in which everyone can do the right thing. An environment in which opinion leaders (elected and not), lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender leaders, non-gay allies and others will not only support, but will insist on full marriage equality. Most importantly, don’t forget to tell us about whatever you plan to do by emailing [Editor1@freedomtomarry.org](mailto:Editor1@freedomtomarry.org).

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EVENTS  
▼▼▼

# How to Write Your Invitation

## A Consistent Look for Your Message

There are several Freedom to Marry logos and banners available for use on our website: [www.freedomtomarry.org](http://www.freedomtomarry.org). If you have questions about the use of these, or if you have graphic support needs beyond what is available on our website, please contact [Editor1@freedomtomarry.org](mailto:Editor1@freedomtomarry.org).



## Use Meetup.com as an Organizing Tool

Do you want to connect with others in your community to plan events for Freedom to Marry Week? One effective online tool for getting others to your meetings is MeetUp:



[www.meetup.com](http://www.meetup.com)

On this site, you can create, manage, and market your Freedom to Marry planning meeting, or check to see if others in your area are already meeting to plan activities and events. All you need is an organizer (you!) and a place to meet. You can use the meet-up service to invite people to participate, post your meeting plans, and discuss your actions. We encourage you to use “Freedom to Marry” in your group title so that others can easily find you. For more help and ideas, visit [www.meetup.com](http://www.meetup.com).

The style and content of your house-party invitation is up to you. For your convenience here are two (2) examples of what you may want to consider including:

# Letter of Invitation Format

– DATE –

Dear Friend:

(Remember that people like a specific, personalized invitation, if you have time to devote to such.)

Talk about specific current issues – briefly....

“Marriage equality began making news more than ever when....”

Tell potential guests why there is a reason to celebrate, discuss the issue, or meet someone who can talk about marriage equality....

Think about including a sentence or two about the effects of denying marriage to same-sex couples and their families. Be sure to include specific people you know or situations you know of that help illustrate the issue in very real, human ways.

Tell invitees what to expect from the evening; not just the date, time, place and other details, but also if they will be expected to donate, share information, etc. If media or cameras or local leaders will be in attendance, make sure people know, so they will not be surprised, scared or intimidated.

Thank them for their consideration and ask them to let you know (in a specific way) if they can or cannot attend.

**Signed...**

# SAMPLE: Letter of Invitation



## *11<sup>th</sup> Annual Freedom to Marry Week Party*

Subject line: You're invited to my Freedom to Marry Party!

Hi [friend],

I'm hosting a Freedom to Marry Party on \_\_\_\_\_ from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_ and I hope you can attend.

Ending the exclusion of same-sex couples and their families from marriage is really important to me. During Freedom to Marry Week, February 10 – 16, 2008, people from across the country will attend events to speak out about fairness for all families. Anti-gay policy makers at every level of government are threatening the rights of families lead by same-sex couples. Only a powerful, grassroots movement can stop opponents' attacks and promote the freedom to marry and that's why I need your help spreading the word about Freedom to Marry week and our events.

Please let me know if you can join me on \_\_\_\_\_ so we can plan and get ready for Freedom to Marry Week.

Sincerely,

---

# SAMPLE: Event Announcement

*Take a look at what Equality Maryland did:*



## Calling All Supporters of Equality!

**Equality Maryland Lobby Day  
Feb. 11, 2008  
4:30 pm - 8:00 pm  
Annapolis**

**We have the chance to make history in Maryland and we need you to be a part of it.**

For the first time in Maryland history, legislators will actually have a chance to extend full marriage protections to gay and lesbian couples as they consider The Religious Freedom and Marriage Protection Act this year. They will also likely be faced with a number of attempts to write anti-LGBT bigotry into the state constitution. Each legislator has a choice to make about endorsing discrimination or promoting equality and constituents are the best way to ensure the decision is made for equality. We need you to [sign up](#) today for the EQMD Lobby Day.

Once you sign up, our district coordinators will schedule your meetings with your elected officials, group you with other constituents in your district to accompany you on your visits, and provide you with legislators' voting records, talking points, and other important information before the date. We will also conduct a training on the lobbying process and the issues on Lobby Day before legislator meetings begin. Email [mary@equalitymaryland.org](mailto:mary@equalitymaryland.org) with any questions.

**Interested in serving as a district coordinator?** [Click here](#) to find out what's involved, and if you'd like to apply, [click here](#).

# How to Host a House Party



The *Human Rights Campaign*, a Freedom to Marry partner organization, has long advocated the value of a “house party” as an effective way to bring people together toward political action, creating awareness around an issue.

House parties are a great way to introduce people to your issue in a fun and casual way. The format is entirely up to you; you may want to make your event a breakfast, or a picnic, or just serve casual snacks, or create a theme around your issue or a holiday. For instance, you might want to have a Valentine Party to highlight marriage equality, or cut straight to the heart of things and have a Freedom to Marry Day house party.

Here are five steps to help you plan a house party:

- **Pick a location.** Your home is perfect. Or how about a friend’s home, a local community center or church? The goal is to make sure your guests feel comfortable. Marriage equality is a very personal issue for some people, so a comfortable atmosphere where it is easy for people to talk and mingle is essential.
- **Pick a date and time.** Have breakfast, or an evening reception, or a wine and cheese gathering. The choice is yours. Allow yourself plenty of time – ideally between three and five weeks – send out and follow up on invitations. Give careful thought to when your primary audience is available and what conflicts they might have. Example: If you are inviting local political representatives, make sure your function is on a night other than their regular meeting night. Or, if you want to include media people, be aware of when they have deadlines, when they are on the air or when they are busy with another event or issue.
- **Invite everyone in your address book – or a defined set of people, depending on your intentions.** A successful house party can have anywhere from 5 to 50 guests. Invite colleagues, friends and anyone else you think might be supportive of or need to hear about marriage equality. Encourage others to bring partners and friends who might want to learn about and support this issue. If raising awareness is your goal, you may want to invite everyone you know. If specific political action is your goal – like introducing state legislators to people directly affected by the lack of marriage equality – you may want to host a smaller gathering of a few key legislators and a few families that include partners who want to marry, gay parents and the like. The more intimate setting gives everyone a chance to talk and get to know one another, and possibly connect on the issue. Real people = real issue.
- **Get ready.** Prepare any materials you need. Basic information about marriage equality. Perhaps a flier from a local organization that champions the issue. Or information about Freedom to Marry partner organizations. If your house party centers on special guests – for instance, a couple that married in Canada or an expert on the marriage equality issue – decide if your other guests may need information about the special guest(s) or speaker(s). Your materials don’t have to be fancy: Just clean, clear and accurate. You can simply print web pages from an organization’s web site!



- **Have your party and have fun.** Begin your program about a half hour after the ‘start’ time. A good way to begin is to tell your guests why and how the issue of marriage equality matters to you. Let them know about any materials you have for them, who any special guests or speakers are, what else is happening during the evening (if you indeed have any kind of agenda – you may not wish to), and how and where they can find more information on the subject of marriage equality.



- **A note about contributions:** You may want to collect contributions to support an organization working toward marriage equality. If so, just be sure your guests are aware that you might ask for such. Your turnout will likely be greater if you do not collect contributions. If you do plan your house party as a fundraiser, you may want to set the stage by pre-arranging with someone who you know will be at the gathering to make the first contribution.
- **Follow up is important:** Remember to relay any feedback to organizations you support and are working with. And if you promised follow-up information to specific guests, be sure to provide it. (Did you promise to send a legislator information about marriage equality efforts in your state or in other areas?)
- **Send thank-you notes** to special guests, speakers, anyone who made a special effort to come, someone who helped you organize the event and so on. *If your party included members of the media, political representatives or others who may affect the marriage equality dialogue*, a good way to be sure they remember you, your event and your issue – marriage equality – is to send them a handwritten thank-you note; thank them for taking the time to attend, thank them for having interest in the issue, encourage them to continue following marriage equality as an issue, and offer yourself and people you know as sources of information on the subject going forward.

# How to Organize a State House Speak Out



**When hosting a statehouse event always remember to:**

1. Secure time and space within the statehouse grounds.
2. Contact the press.

***Sample:** "Today in the State House, (your organization name) will host a Marriage resolution ceremony. Hosted by Representative (name), house members will sign a resolution in support of ending marriage discrimination and will deliver the resolution to the Speaker of the House. A Press Conference with several couples and their children along with the member of the House and Senate will follow their delivery."*

3. Secure one or more legislators' presence.
4. Have couples share personal stories.
5. Deliver copies of the Marriage Resolution to legislators to sign.
6. State houses are not the only places for speak out. You can and should select spaces such as City Hall where you can highlight marriage license denials or Social Security offices as a benefit which same-gender couples are denied. Again, make sure to invite non-gay supporters and secure a space to ensure peaceful actions!



# Speak Out ... From a Perspective of Faith



A powerful way to weigh in for marriage equality is to speak out as a person of faith, and/or by encouraging religious and spiritual leaders to speak out.

For instance lesbian and gay couples, their families, and the people who care about them, who are people of faith can write letters to the editor for publication in newspapers and other publications. They can also write to reporters, editors and producers, asking them to cover this issue, particularly from the inclusive perspective of faith, values and spirituality.

We all know that communities of faith listen when their leaders speak. So, encourage religious and spiritual leaders you know to

speak out for marriage equality, not only in the community at large, but through a sermon or other interaction with their congregation. (A few examples of sermons on the subject are shared here, as well as a call to collect more of the same. Please see below.)

Liturgical resources highlighting Freedom to Marry Week extend educational opportunities and encourage and empower people of faith. Consider helping your own faith community – as a congregant or as one of the community’s leaders – to make resources available that educate people about marriage equality.

Organize – or at least recommend – an interfaith service, bolstering people of all faiths as they support the marriage equality movement.

Suggest that same-sex couples in your congregation be invited during Freedom to Marry Week – or at some other time – to stand and speak their names and the number of years they have been together. This helps bring notice to the fact that they are committed, yet denied civil marriage.

Such actions are powerful antidotes to the loud, negative voices of a few religious leaders who seem to want to keep marriage unequal. Allies, this is one of those times when we especially need your voices to be heard.



*Soulforce* (a Freedom to Marry partner) has wonderful materials, including worship resources and talking points, available to you at:

*[www.soulforce.org/main/marriage.shtml](http://www.soulforce.org/main/marriage.shtml)*

# Calling All Clergy...

Freedom to Marry – with the help of its coalition partners – is putting together an archive of sermons, homilies and other spiritual talks on marriage equality for same-sex couples.

Some of these will specifically support the marriage equality movement, while others may examine related facets, such as the proposed Federal Marriage Amendment.

Eventually, we want to include writings/talks from a broad variety of faith communities, including Christian, Unitarian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu and any other religious or spiritual messaging. If you are a faith leader who is writing or speaking about marriage equality, please consider sharing your writings, speeches and/or sermons with Freedom to Marry.



If you are willing to share your sermons and faith-based speeches, please also forward it (as a Word attachment or pasted into an email) to: [info@freedomtomarry.org](mailto:info@freedomtomarry.org).

If you'd like, please also share with our partners at Soulforce by emailing to: **Rev. Dr. Mel White, Founder, Soulforce** at [melwhite@soulforce.com](mailto:melwhite@soulforce.com).

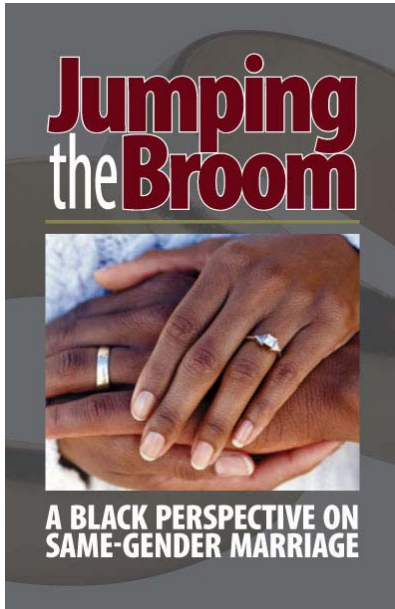
Samples of a few of the sermons we have already collected are available at [http://www.freedomtomarry.org/get\\_informed/communities/religion\\_and\\_faith.php](http://www.freedomtomarry.org/get_informed/communities/religion_and_faith.php). These include sermons delivered during past years' Freedom to Marry Sundays and more.

For even more selections, log on to [www.welcomingresources.org](http://www.welcomingresources.org).

Obviously, not every sermon is appropriate for every individual, congregation or community of faith, but we do hope the examples inspire thought and encourage you to engage your community of faith on the topic of marriage equality.

▼▼▼  
MEDIA  
▼▼▼

# How to Engage the Media



One of the most effective ways to generate media attention on a topic – especially a topic that is controversial and/or timely – is for everyday people to ask the media in their area to cover the issue.

It is especially effective to become a source for the media outlet from which you are soliciting coverage on an issue. Let them know if you're willing to be interviewed or otherwise share your personal experience with an issue (your desire to marry your partner, your wish to see marriage equality realized for people you care about or simply your outrage at the injustice of our laws not permitting marriage equality for same-sex couples).

Likewise, include the names of people you know who would be willing to weigh in on the issue of marriage equality. Include the names of people and organizations you would like to hear from on the subject.

Be sure to include the names of any organizations you know of that work within marriage equality. For instance, a reporter or editor may not know about Freedom to Marry and its many important partner organizations. Also, be certain to include information about any local organizations working to further marriage equality. That

might be a statewide lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender political organization, a group from your church or perhaps a contingent from a local college campus.

Guest editorials, “op-eds” and letters to the editor are great ways to address current issues, especially if inappropriate and defamatory coverage of gay issues has surfaced in your local media outlets. Not only can your letter to or article for the local media help them provide more balanced coverage, but by becoming part of the dialogue around the issue, you simultaneously reach the outlet's audience with your message.

Keep in mind that letters to the editor are most useful when your goal is to comment on an issue or previous coverage more generally. You also can write to a publication or broadcast outlet to initiate coverage, though you'll really need to state your case well to get a media outlet to cover something it has not covered thus far. Op-eds – articles by experts and “regular people” written in the first person, expressing an opinion – are most useful when your goal is to correct inaccurate or incomplete coverage. Be sure to add to, correct or critique previous coverage, and not duplicate it. Media outlets want to hear fresh ideas and fresh voices, and they certainly want anything they print or carry to be accurate and not defamatory.

When you consider the media outlets you are willing to write to, be sure to include your hometown newspaper. But also don't forget more specialized publications like union newsletters, newspapers designed to reach specific communities like African-Americans or Latina/os, school and faith-community newspapers, radio stations, television stations and your favorite blogs and web sites. State your case in a traditional letter that you fax or mail, or utilize e-mail. Just be sure to address any of your correspondence, be it snail mail or electronic, to a specific person, wherever possible. That way you ensure your message will be “heard.” The only exception to this is a letter to the editor; most newspapers and other publications allow letters (generally those to be considered for publication) to come to a more generic postal or electronic address.

# How to Write Letters to the Editor

- ✎ **Make one point (or at most two)** in your letter or fax. State the point clearly, ideally in the first sentence.
- ✎ **Make your letter timely.** If you are not addressing a specific article, editorial or letter that recently appeared in the paper you are writing to, and then try to tie the issue you want to write about to a recent event.
- ✎ **Familiarize yourself with the coverage and editorial position of the paper to which you are writing.** Refute or support specific statements, address relevant facts that are ignored, but do avoid blanket attacks on the media in general or the newspaper in particular.
- ✎ **Check the letter specifications of the newspaper to which you are writing.** Length and format requirements vary from paper to paper. (Generally, roughly two short paragraphs are ideal.) You also must include your name, address and phone number. (Again, you may indicate that your letter is “not for publication,” but it has far greater impact if you will allow it to be considered for publication.)
- ✎ **Look at the letters that appear in your paper. Is a certain type of letter usually printed?** That may give you clues as to what to include – or not to include.
- ✎ **Support your facts.** If the topic you address is controversial, consider sending documentation along with your letter. But don’t overload the editors with too much info.
- ✎ **Find others to write letters when possible.** This will show that other individuals in the community are concerned about the issue. If your letter doesn’t get published, perhaps someone else’s on the same topic will.
- ✎ **And don’t fret if your letter is not published.** There are many reasons your letter may not be selected, the most common of which is that publications receive many, many letters and must make tough choices. If your letter is not published, don’t let that discourage you from writing at another time, when the same or another issue moves you to action.



# How to Write Op-Eds



- Op-eds are longer than letters to the editor, and there is more competition for space. Check the publication for length requirements (usually 600-800 words).
- Maximize the possibility that a publication will accept your op-ed piece by addressing a controversial or fresh aspect of current news. If you can use a professional title that suggests authority, do so. If you work for an organization, get permission to sign the op-ed as a representative of that organization.
- If you submit a piece to multiple papers in different markets, call and assure the op-ed editors that the piece has not been submitted to any other paper in their individual market.
- If, on the other hand, you send it to only one paper, let that paper know you are offering them an exclusive.
- In writing op-eds, avoid excessive rhetoric or jargon. State the subject under controversy clearly. You are trying to persuade a middle-of-the-road readership. If you rely on facts not commonly found in mainstream media, cite your sources.
- Try to think of a catchy title. If you don't, the paper will be more likely to run its own – which may not emphasize your central message. (Even if you do write your own headline, don't be surprised if it is not used. It still has value because it helps the editor focus on your central point.)
- Be personal and conversational, but not too relaxed.

**Communications professionals from the *Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD)*, a Freedom to Marry partner organization, contributed greatly to this section.**

A list of Freedom to Marry Partner organizations can be found at the end of this resource guide. Again, you may want to share information about one or all of these organizations with members of the media you choose to contact.



Also, if you know of other organizations which you find are good sources of information on the marriage equality movement, please let us know at [info@FreedomtoMarry.org](mailto:info@FreedomtoMarry.org) so we can tell other people about them.

# SAMPLE: Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

*[Insert Date Here]*

## LOCAL SAME-SEX COUPLE SUPPORTS FREEDOM TO MARRY

*[Insert City/Town Name Here] Same-Sex Couples To Apply For Marriage Licenses*

(YOUR TOWN) -- When the marriage bureau opens on [Insert Date] during Valentine's Week, **[Insert Name Here]** will be waiting in line for a marriage license.

She/he will be standing in line with her/his same-sex partner **[Insert Name Here]**.

**[Insert Both First Names]** are among thousands of gay, lesbian, and bisexual couples around the country who believe there should be fairness and equality for all families.

"We're asking for equal rights. We're simply asking for fairness under the law and for an end to discrimination in marriage," said **[Insert Name]**.

**[Insert First Names Here]** are part of a country-wide movement working to end the exclusion of same-sex couples and their families from marriage. According to officials at the Freedom to Marry, "Only with marriage does a person have the right to medical decision-making for a loved one, parenting rights, access to insurance, inheritance protections, and immigration rights. The act of getting married is invested with public, historical, and spiritual significance, and is emotionally charged for the individuals involved, as well as society. Until same-sex couples have the freedom to marry, discrimination in marriage will remain a profound barrier to achieving fairness for all families."

"It's time for the [Insert Name of Your Country Here] to catch up with nations such as Canada, Spain, Belgium, South Africa and the Netherlands which already provide for marriage equality," **[Insert Your Name Here]**.

What if their application for a marriage license is turned down? "We are hope-filled people," said **[Insert Your Name Here]**. "If we are turned down this year, we plan to come back next year and we'll continue calling attention to the discrimination that exists. And we'll continue to share our love and commitment without the benefits provided to most citizens."

-END-

To arrange local interviews or for more information, contact:

**[Insert Name of Local Participants]**  
**[Insert Mailing Address]**  
**[Insert Phone Numbers]**  
**[Insert E-Mail Address]**

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APPENDIX  
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# Freedom to Marry National Partners

<p><b>American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)</b>  <a href="http://www.aclu.org/getequal/rela/index.html">www.aclu.org/getequal/rela/index.html</a>            212.549.2627  <a href="mailto:getequal@aclu.org">getequal@aclu.org</a></p>	National	<p>The ACLU works daily in courts, legislatures and communities throughout the country to defend and preserve the individual rights and liberties guaranteed by the Constitution and laws of the United States.</p>
<p><b>Children Of Lesbians and Gays Everywhere (COLAGE)</b>  <a href="http://www.colage.org">www.colage.org</a>            415.861.5437  <a href="mailto:colage@colage.org">colage@colage.org</a></p>	National	<p>COLAGE fosters the growth of daughters and sons of LGBT parents by providing education, support, and community, advocating for their rights and for the rights of their families, and by promoting acceptance and awareness in society.</p>
<p><b>Equality Federation</b>  <a href="http://www.equalityfederation.org">www.equalityfederation.org</a>            877.790.2674  <a href="mailto:info@equalityfederation.org">info@equalityfederation.org</a></p>	National	<p>A network of state/territory organizations committed to working with each other and with national and local groups to strengthen statewide lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender advocacy organizing and secure full civil rights in every U.S. state and territory.</p>
<p><b>Family Equality Council</b>  <a href="http://www.familyequality.org">www.familyequality.org</a>            617.502.8700  <a href="mailto:info@familyequality.org">info@familyequality.org</a></p>	National	<p>Originally known as Family Pride, the Family Equality Council is a national education and civil rights organization that advances the well-being of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered parents and their families through mutual support, community collaboration, and public understanding.</p>
<p><b>Gay &amp; Lesbian Advocates &amp; Defenders (GLAD)</b>  <a href="http://www.glad.org">www.glad.org</a>            617.426.1350  <a href="mailto:gladlaw@glad.org">gladlaw@glad.org</a></p>		<p>Based in Massachusetts, GLAD pursues equal justice under law in all areas of importance to the LGBT communities, and to the lives of people with HIV and AIDS throughout New England, with the intention of ending discrimination on the basis of gender identity or expression.</p>
<p><b>Gay &amp; Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD)</b>  <a href="http://www.glaad.org">www.glaad.org</a>            212.629.3322</p>	National	<p>GLAAD promotes and ensures fair, accurate and inclusive representation of people and events in the media as a means of eliminating homophobia and discrimination based on gender identity and sexual orientation.</p>
<p><b>Gay &amp; Lesbian Victory Fund</b>  <a href="http://www.victoryfund.org">www.victoryfund.org</a>            202.842.7301</p>	National	<p>The Victory Fund is committed to increasing the number of openly gay and lesbian public officials at federal, state and local levels of government by recruiting, training, and supporting openly LGBT candidates and officials.</p>
<p><b>Human Rights Campaign (HRC)</b>  <a href="http://www.hrc.org">www.hrc.org</a>            202.628.4160  <a href="mailto:hrc@hrc.org">hrc@hrc.org</a></p>	National	<p>HRC is the nation's largest lesbian and gay organization working to advance equality based on sexual orientation and gender expression and identity to ensure that LGBT Americans can be open, honest, and safe at home, at work, and in their communities.</p>
<p><b>Lambda Legal</b>  <a href="http://www.lambdalegal.org">www.lambdalegal.org</a>            212.809.8585</p>	National	<p>Lambda Legal is a national legal group committed to achieving full recognition of the civil rights of, and combating the discrimination against, the LGBT community, and people with HIV/AIDS, through impact litigation, education, and public policy work.</p>

<p><b>Log Cabin Republicans</b>  online.logcabin.org  202.347.5306  press@logcabin.org</p>	National	Log Cabin operates within the Republican Party for the equal rights of all Americans, including gay men and women, according to the principles of limited government, individual liberty, individual responsibility, free markets, and a strong national defense.
<p><b>Marriage Equality USA (MEUSA)</b>  www.marriageequality.org  510.496.2700  info@marriageequality.org</p>	National	Marriage Equality works to secure the freedom and the right of same-sex couples to engage in civil marriage, with all the federal and state benefits that entails, through a program of education, media campaigns, and community partnerships.
<p><b>National Association of LGBT Community Centers</b>  www.lgbtcenters.org  202.824.0450  terry@lgbtcenters.org</p>	National	The Association, with over 140 community centers in the U.S. nationwide, exists to support and enhance lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community centers, which are engines of community organizing and liberation, and crucial to the health and strength of LGBT communities.
<p><b>National Black Justice Coalition</b>  www.nbjcoalition.org  202.349.3755  info@nbjcoalition.org</p>	National	The NBJC is a civil rights organization dedicated to empowering Black same-gender-loving, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered people. The Coalition works with our communities and our allies for social justice, equality, and an end to racism and homophobia.
<p><b>National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR)</b>  www.nclr.org  415.392.6257  info@nclrights.org</p>	National	NCLR is a national legal resource center devoted to advancing the rights and safety of lesbians and their families through a program of litigation, public policy advocacy, free legal advice and counseling, and public education.
<p><b>National Gay &amp; Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF)</b>  thetaskforce.org  212.604.9830  info@thetaskforce.org</p>	National	The Task Force is building a national civil rights movement of LGBT people through the empowerment and training of state and local leaders, and through the research and development of national policy.
<p><b>National Organization for Women (NOW)</b>  www.now.org  202-628-8669</p>	National	NOW is the largest organization of feminist women and men in the United States, striving to eliminate discrimination and harassment against women in the workplace, schools, the justice system, and all other sectors of society.
<p><b>National Stonewall Democrats</b>  www.stonewalldemocrats.org  202.625.1382  field@stonewalldemocrats.org</p>	National	The National Stonewall Democrats is a grassroots network connecting LGBT Democratic activists from Seattle, Washington to Austin, Texas to Little Rock, Arkansas to Atlanta, Georgia. With more than 90 chapters across the country, Stonewall is a grassroots force for social change within our movement and within our party.
<p><b>Parents, Families &amp; Friends of Lesbians &amp; Gays (PFLAG)</b>  www.pflag.org  202.467.8180  info@pflag.org</p>	National	PFLAG promotes the health and well-being of LGBT persons, and their families and friends, through support, education, and advocacy with the intention of ending discrimination and securing equal civil rights.
<p><b>People for the American Way (PFAW)</b>  www.pfaw.org  202.467.4999  pfaw@pfaw.org</p>	National	People for the American Way is a national membership organization focused on protecting democratic values and institutions currently threatened by the political influence of the Radical Right.

<b>Soulforce</b> <a href="http://www.soulforce.org">www.soulforce.org</a> 512.659.1771 <a href="mailto:info@soulforce.org">info@soulforce.org</a>	National	Soulforce is an interfaith movement committed to ending spiritual violence perpetuated by religious policies and teachings against LGBT people through the application of the principles of non-violence as taught and lived by Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King.
<b>Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches (UFMCC)</b> <a href="http://www.mccchurch.org">www.mccchurch.org</a> 310.360.8640 <a href="mailto:info@mccchurch.net">info@mccchurch.net</a>	National	MCC is a Christian Church founded in, and reaching beyond, the Gay and Lesbian communities, embodying and proclaiming Christian salvation and liberation, Christian inclusivity and community, and Christian social action and justice.

Find out about statewide lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender advocacy organizations by visiting [www.EqualityFederation.org](http://www.EqualityFederation.org).

# Let Us Know What You're Doing for Freedom to Marry Week!



We're interested to know what you will be doing to recognize – and to help bring notice to – **Freedom to Marry Day and Freedom to Marry Week.**

Once you have committed to an activity, we hope you will let us know what you will be doing and let us know if we can share information about your Freedom to Marry Day/Week plans with others (including the media).

Likewise, if you have creative ideas about how you think Freedom to Marry Week should be recognized – other than ways suggested in this resource kit – we hope you will share those thoughts.

**Send your Freedom to Marry Week ideas, as well as your plans for Freedom to Marry Week, to [Editor1@freedomtomarry.org](mailto:Editor1@freedomtomarry.org).**

# Event Planning Worksheet

## Logistics

1. Where do you plan to hold your Party/Event?
  - Your house or apartment
  - Community recreation center (or equivalent)
  - Bar/restaurant
  - Church/synagogue
  - Other (please describe): \_\_\_\_\_
2. Is this venue easily accessible and easy to find?
3. Will your event be held:
  - In the morning
  - At noon (i.e. luncheon)
  - Afternoon
  - Evening
4. Do you plan on having your event on February 12th?
  - Yes
  - No—If no, what is the date of your event? \_\_\_\_\_
5. Who is helping you plan and host your Freedom to Marry Party/Event?
6. How do you plan on handling the following key elements of your Freedom to Marry Party/Event?
  - Freedom to Marry Resolution signatures: \_\_\_\_\_
  - Education/Outreach Volunteer recruitment: \_\_\_\_\_
  - Sign-up sheets to collect names of potential new organization members:  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - Donations made at your event: \_\_\_\_\_

## Benchmarks

1. How many people are you going to *invite* to your event?
  - 30 – 50
  - 50 – 100
  - 100 – 150
  - 150 – 300
  - 300 – 600
  - More than 600
2. How many guests do you expect to *attend* your event?
  - 30 – 50
  - 50 – 100

- 100 – 200
- More than 200

3. What steps will you follow to issue your invitations or announcements for your party/event?

- E-vite (*www.evite.com*)
- Send Invitations
- Phone calls
- Emails
- Posters
- Flyers
- Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

4. What steps will you take to follow up?

- Phone calls     Date \_\_\_\_\_
- E-mail reminders     Date \_\_\_\_\_
- Both     Date \_\_\_\_\_
- Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

5. How many new organization members will you recruit at your event?

- 10 – 15
- 15 – 30
- 30 – 60
- More than 60

6. Who will do recruit the new organizations members? \_\_\_\_\_

## **Specific Needs**

1. Do you plan on inviting a speaker or honored guest to your event?

- No

If no, do you need help locating such a speaker for your event (if applicable)?

- Yes

If yes, who?

2. Will you need additional help on the night of your event?

3. Have you contacted other organizations in your area to coordinate events?

- No

If no, do you need help with locating such organizations?

- Yes

Who?