Objectives

To describe:

1. why it is important for the Mpowerment Project to have a space of its own;
2. what to look for in a space;
3. to offer guidelines about how to select a space; and
4. to suggest how to set up a space to be effective and appealing.
**Home, Sweet Home:**
*Not just any space will do*

Finding the right space for the Project is one key to its success. If young gay/bisexual men find the space comfortable, desirable, and convenient, they will be more likely to attend Project activities. Ideally, the space will serve as a gathering spot or community center for young gay/bisexual men. Even if you don’t have enough money for a stand-alone Project space, it’s really important to consider alternative spaces where Project participants can meet on a regular basis. Since most activities occur here, the space becomes an important aspect of the Project’s goal to build community. It provides a consistent setting where participants can meet and socialize.

Even if you can’t afford a stand alone space, you’ll still need to find a suitable space where the Project members can meet and work and socialize - because having a space encourages community-building and support.

**The importance of having a separate space**

*There are three main reasons for having a separate space for the Mpowerment Project:*

1. It is more convenient to have your own location where you can hold most Project activities.

2. A separate space can help in building a strong and healthy young gay/bisexual men’s community, and is often more comfortable for young gay/bisexual men than other arrangements. A separate space helps to give the Project a sense of identity, and can be used to build pride in being gay. Projects specifically for young men of color can use the space to build pride in being of specific ethnic/racial heritage.

3. It makes it easier to display sexually graphic, gay-specific safer sex posters and distribute safer sex promotional materials and condoms. This helps build an environment that supports safer sex and testing.
Each of these points is discussed below in greater detail. But in brief, a Project space offers young men a place where:

- they can find other young gay/bisexual men, to build supportive relationships, make new friends
- they can be comfortable being openly gay/bisexual, and can get support for being proud about their sexual orientation and same sex attraction
- they can meet and talk about anything, without worrying that people uncomfortable with their sexual orientation will be there to hassle them
- they have real time, in-person alternatives to online communities
- they can be in an environment that supports their having safer sex and getting tested
- if they are part of an ethnic or racial minority group, they can feel support and build pride about their racial/ethnic background

**Convenience**

Simply put, it is more convenient to have a safe space of your own—one that is gay-friendly, private, and discrete. This will eliminate your having to deal with issues that might arise regarding sexuality and being gay or bisexual. Project participants will be able to arrange the space the way they want, and make it attractive to young gay/bisexual men. The space will be available whenever you want it, so you won’t have to find a new location every time you plan a new activity. Given the number of activities that the Project conducts, this will save time and energy. And probably your own space will be more affordable over time than renting outside spaces. Although occasionally you will want to hold activities somewhere else—usually when you need a larger space—most activities can be held at your own space. Having your own space will also save you from having to negotiate with the owners of other spaces.

In many communities where the Mpowerment Project has been implemented, organizations have rented a space that eventually became, in essence, a young men’s community center that also housed the Project. The space has been used in many different ways. Most groups connected to the Project meet in the space. These include staff meetings, some Community Advisory Board meetings, Core Group meetings, volunteer committee meetings, and most M-groups. Most Social Outreach Events have also been held at the space. These include occasional Social Outreach Events such as parties, open houses, and small forums, in addition to weekly events such as video nights and discussion groups.

The MPower House in Albuquerque had an outdoor space that began as a small weed-filled lot adjoining a separate unused side yard. Through the hard work of volunteers, they converted the space into a volleyball court which saw action every Sunday afternoon throughout the spring, summer, and fall. In addition, the space was used for picnics and barbecues. Mpowerment Detroit used a loft space located downtown. The space was large, open, and easily
The Project space is essential to building a supportive community for young men.

Adaptable. Sofas and chairs could be pushed aside for large events. The walls were decorated with photos of core group members and participants, nicely framed and carefully hung. The space felt homey, welcoming, and most of all, safe and accessible.

When Projects have their own space, it is easier to set up specific “drop-in” days and times when young gay/bisexual men can just hang out and socialize. It is also possible to leave out referral information (e.g., where to get tested for HIV and other STDs, places to obtain job training, mental health referrals), as well as a small library of books, magazines, and videos of interest to young gay/bisexual men. We also recommend having a large calendar on display in the Project space that lists all the Project’s upcoming events. Having this visual reminder helps increase attendance and makes scheduling other events easier.

Building community, support and pride

In the last 10-15 years, some things have changed in society. Being out isn’t as controversial as it once was. There are now “out” celebrities hosting daily TV shows, and openly gay sitcom and drama characters are part of the television landscape. Discussion about same sex marriage is commonplace in the news, and national politicians talk about our lives, for better or worse. The Internet continues its explosive growth and hosts tons of websites and social networking sites, such as Facebook and MySpace, where gay/bisexual men can chat with each other, share their stories, support each other, make friends, or find sex partners.

In the face of all this change, some people have questioned whether young gay/bisexual men still have the same need for community as in the past. Our experience working with and watching Mpowerment Projects operate around the country—Projects that reach very diverse populations—tells us the answer is a resounding “Yes!” Young gay/bisexual men still want and need the support, safety, and power that a community-building project like the Mpowerment Project offers. We continue to hear young men tell us about the tremendous impact that the Mpowerment Project has had in their lives, in terms of a host of issues. HIV prevention is prominent among them, but they include other important issues as well, such as coming out, making friends, family pressures, dealing with homophobia, alienation, isolation, and self-esteem.

As previously described, this Project seeks to mobilize young gay/bisexual men to speak with and encourage each other about the need for safer sex and
getting tested regularly. However, when they have few friends, such efforts are less effective. If a young man is only hearing supportive conversations about safer sex and testing from one or two friends, it is not nearly as effective as when he’s hearing such messages from numerous friends, who are also expressing caring and support to him. Therefore, an important aspect of the Project is to help these men be part of a larger, supportive young gay/bisexual men’s community. This is one of the Project’s Guiding Principles, the importance of building a supportive community for young men. A separate Project space greatly increases the opportunities to build new friendships with other young gay/bisexual men who have also heard the same messages about safer sex and testing. Therefore, the Project space is an important way of supporting this Guiding Principle.

**A Project space offers young men the following**

In such an environment friendships flourish, and new social networks that support safer sex and testing develop. It encourages community-building. A second Guiding Principle is also enacted at the space: pride in being gay/bisexual and in having same-sex attractions.

By offering a variety of activities in your Project space, it can become the focal point of a health-promoting, supportive, and empowered young gay/bisexual men’s community.

The space can also be used in building pride in being of specific ethnic/racial backgrounds. For example, posters and materials can focus on being African American and can have materials about Black gay/bisexual men who have been leaders in the community, poetry can be posted about the beauty of being of African descent, or materials in the space can feature information on Black inventors, scientists, and political leaders (including pride in having an African American president). Similarly, pride in being of Latin American descent can be displayed in a space, or of other ethnic/racial groups.

**Maintaining a supportive, safer sex environment**

A separate Project space can also be used to remind everyone about the need for safer sex and to know their current HIV status. Posters about HIV prevention and testing can hang on the walls, and safer sex materials can be placed throughout the space, both in public spaces (e.g., in bowls around the space) as well as in private spaces (e.g., in the bathroom, where someone can take condoms without being seen by others). Therefore, men who are simply hanging out in the Project space are continually reminded of these issues. Without a separate space, maintaining a display of appropriate safer sex materials tailored to your local community of young gay/bisexual men can be much more difficult.
WHAT SOME YOUNG GAY/BISEXUAL MEN HAD TO SAY ABOUT THEIR PROJECT SPACE:

“I like the house, I think it’s a good thing for people to have one place to go instead of meeting at different people’s houses or apartments or whatever... I think it’s good to have a solid base so you can do things here...”

“This is a place where guys can come to hang out together, to meet other guys, to feel good about being gay and to protect and support each other.”

“I love our house, we made it feel like a place that someone actually lives as opposed to some place that’s an extension of the AIDS project.”

“For me the best part of MPower is the feeling that I’m in a safe place... MPower to me is very safe... I allow myself to relax a little bit, I allow myself to have fun... I really don’t hold back on any movements I usually make that might be a little too loud... I’m in a safe place here... I’m among friends.”

“I think it’s great to have a center open for guys to come by and come and go when they want. I think it’s very important to have a central location, a central command.”
Options for creating the Project space
The Project space can be configured in a variety of ways depending on the needs and resources of each community. Below are some alternatives.

Independent space
The Project rents independent space that is used solely for Mpowerment Project activities. As discussed above, this option is ideal, because it provides the physical space needed to create a true community center for young gay/bisexual men. Additionally, the content or appearance of safer sex posters or pamphlets geared toward gay/bisexual men may be graphic. With an independent Project space, there are opportunities for displaying materials that might be controversial in mixed-use settings. If it is possible to obtain an independent space for your Project, we strongly recommend you do so. Unfortunately, this is also the most expensive option, and for many communities this may not be possible. However, many organizations have had success in obtaining funding for their Project space from the CDC, foundations, and/or state health departments.

Shared space
The Project shares space within an existing organization such as a lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender community center, youth center, or other organization. This option has a number of advantages in that it creates an automatic linkage with another community agency. Before choosing it, however, carefully consider the implications of affiliating with particular organizations. An agency’s reputation in the community can either help or damage the impression that young gay/bisexual men will have of your Project when they learn of the affiliation. Whatever organization is chosen should be one that young gay/bisexual men find appealing and comfortable.

A word of caution
The Project should avoid being perceived by young gay/bisexual men as an HIV/AIDS organization. Therefore, we strongly recommend against hosting Mpowerment activities at an AIDS Service Organization (ASO), even when an ASO is the sponsoring or implementing agency. In communities where we have helped to set up Mpowerment Projects, we have quickly learned that many young gay/bisexual men were not interested in working or socializing at HIV/AIDS-related organizations, or were even repelled by it. Our research found that HIV/AIDS is not a particularly motivating topic for most young gay/bisexual men. (See Module 1: Overview for a more full discussion of this topic). Therefore, conducting events at an ASO may limit the number and types of young men who attend the activities.

Multiple spaces
The Project uses a network of spaces for different Project activities instead of one central location. For example, the administrative functions and staff office may be located at one location, such as at an office within the implementing agency, and each of the various Project activities (M-groups, Core Group meetings, and Social Outreach activities) may take place in different locations. These spaces can be rented or donated for both ongoing and one-time use as needed.
As stated earlier, it is important to choose these locations carefully. There is no reason, for example, why the Project’s administrative work cannot be done in the implementing agency office space or other HIV-related space, since usually only the Project Coordinators are involved in those activities. However, for other Project activities, the location is critical.

While meeting spaces at AIDS Service Organizations, religious institutions, or mental health providers may be readily available in your community, they may not appeal to many young gay/bisexual men. Meeting in people’s homes or in local cafes can be low-cost alternatives. This option offers a number of advantages since each space can be selected based on the nature of the event. For example, a small, homely setting may be appropriate for M-groups, whereas a large warehouse space may be ideal for large social outreach events. It also makes it possible for Project activities to take place in different settings, and participants may like having this variety of meeting places. In addition, it provides an opportunity to reach out to different segments of the young gay/bisexual men’s community. For instance, Social Outreach Events might alternate between various neighborhoods within the community, thereby reaching different groups of men. If the Project is trying to reach men across a very large area, then having multiple meeting spaces throughout the area may be the best option.

One way to solve the logistical problem of needing to assemble and haul materials from place to place is to prepare plastic crates full of materials. These can easily be transported to each meeting space. For example, one crate could contain all of the supplies necessary for an M-group (See Module 9: M-groups), and the facilitators could just pick up the crate from the office before each group and take it to the various locations. This option minimizes last-minute scrambling around for the necessary supplies.

Housing the Project within an AIDS Service Organization should be avoided because it may limit how many young men attend activities.
Steps in choosing a space

“Location, location, location!” So the cliché goes, and in choosing a space for the Project, it’s advice that’s worth following.

Identify the best areas

The first step in selecting a space is to determine where the best places are to locate the Project in your town or city. For this research you’ll want to use some of the community assessment techniques described in Module 2: Community Assessment.

This task can be as simple as talking with a cross-section of young gay/bisexual men in your community. Be sure to include men of different ages, income, education levels, racial/ethnic backgrounds, and neighborhoods. Find out from them what they think the best location(s) would be. Here are some important criteria to consider:

- Which parts of town are most easily accessible for young gay/bisexual men?
- Do you need a car to get there, or is it close to public transportation?
- If young men will be driving to the space, is there adequate parking?
- In general, how appealing are the various areas to young gay/bisexual men?
- How comfortable would men of diverse backgrounds feel in the neighborhood?
- How safe are various areas for young gay/bisexual men?
- How affordable are the rents in particular areas?

We have found that by informally interviewing about 10-15 young gay/bisexual men from different segments of the community, a consensus usually emerges about the most desirable locations for the Project. If the Project is started before space is located, then we strongly encourage Core Group members and Project participants to be actively involved in the decision-making process. In this case, Project staff alone should not make the decision about where to locate the Project.
A consensus usually emerges about the most desirable locations for the Project.

Work with realtors

Scour newspaper listings and check with local realtors for leads—especially gay or gay-friendly realtors. We found our spaces in Santa Cruz, Santa Barbara, and Albuquerque with the help of local gay and lesbian realtors who volunteered their time to help us. (The commission on small rental properties is usually very small, which explains, in part, why realtors who are willing to help find suitable sites may also be willing to donate their time.)

Look and search yourself

Use whatever avenues are available to you to put the word out that you are looking for a space to rent. Contact people who may know of spaces. Look for “For Rent” signs. In smaller and mid-sized communities, this is likely to be the most effective approach. This is how we found great spaces in Eugene and Albuquerque. However, you sometimes need to work with a realtor even if you identify a location yourself. We would recommend always working with a realtor even if you locate it yourself, since they know many of the issues that come up in renting spaces, unless there is someone at the implementing agency who already knows about such issues.

Network

Put the word out that you’re looking for a space to rent, using whatever avenues are available to you. Write letters or phone people who may know of spaces. Place announcements in newsletters, post flyers, and use sites on the Internet such as craigslist. Let as many people as you can think of know that you are looking for a space and tell them what your specifications are (size, rent, location, etc.). Local churches often own property—including houses, apartment buildings, and office spaces—which they are willing to rent to non-profit organizations for well below the market value. Sometimes other property owners will provide space cheaply or at no-cost for tax write-off purposes. It can’t hurt to ask as many people as you can for a good deal; the worst that can happen is that someone will say no.

Check out each potential space in person

First, identify all the criteria that are important for your space, such as price, size, location, condition, versatility, functionality, neighbors, and the landlord. For example, if the neighborhood is totally quiet and residential, having large Social Outreach Events on Friday nights that attract 75 young, loud, and proud gay/bisexual men could be problematic and generate complaints from the neighbors. Also, if the landlord seems homophobic and unsupportive of the Project, you may be in for up-coming battles. We have found that many landlord’s concerns can be taken care of by reassuring them that Project participants will not be sleeping in the space and that the Project will not be offering clinical services. Of course, these concerns vary from landlord to landlord. You can use the following checklist to help in your decision-making process.
## Potential Project Space Checklist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Which property</th>
<th>Rate each of the following on a 1-5 scale</th>
<th>(1=poor, 5=excellent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utility</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Square footage</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of rooms</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location in community</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Privacy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Versatility</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Yard</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Public Transportation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Parking</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighbors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size of room for small group meeting (M-group, Outreach Teams)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size of room for larger meetings (Core Group)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Next, we recommend that the Project Coordinators along with one or two volunteers visit each potential space and discuss its pros and cons. The Coordinators and volunteers should ask themselves if the space meets their minimum qualifications, and decide together how successful it will be to mold the space into a warm and welcoming center for young gay/bisexual men. The final decision should be based on the information that has been compiled about the various spaces. Negotiations might be necessary with the landlord for such things as repairs, safety bars on windows, smoke/burglar alarms, and wheelchair accessibility.

Furnishing the space
The process of furnishing the space is an important team-building exercise for the Core Group, and it’s fun for everyone. It helps volunteers get to know each other. It allows them to feel that the space is really theirs. It also provides them with a sense of accomplishment and empowerment as they watch the space become their “home.” And who knows better than young gay/bisexual men what type of décor will be most appealing and comfortable for themselves and their peers? (See table below for suggested furnishings. These are discussed more later in this module.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Furniture</th>
<th>Office Equipment</th>
<th>Homey Touches</th>
<th>Outdoor Supplies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Desks</td>
<td>Telephone (with 2 separate lines)</td>
<td>Plants</td>
<td>Potted Plants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table</td>
<td>Bulletin Board</td>
<td>Posters/artwork (especially gay-positive themes)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couches</td>
<td>Answering Machine</td>
<td>Knick-knacks</td>
<td>Barbecue Grill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chairs</td>
<td>Flip charts/Marker pens</td>
<td>Coffee/tea-maker</td>
<td>Volleyball net + ball Basketball net + ball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coffee table</td>
<td>Office supplies</td>
<td>Popcorn maker</td>
<td>Picnic or patio table + chairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Side tables</td>
<td>Computer</td>
<td>Pots/pans</td>
<td>Lawnmower/weed eater/leaf blower/rake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pillows for sitting on</td>
<td>Fax machine</td>
<td>Microwave</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bookshelves</td>
<td>Large Calendar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV/DVD player</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Stereo or boom box</td>
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</table>
In our sample budget, we allocate $4,000 to furnish the space, and we included such items as lawn mowers, plants, and computers. What you spend to furnish the space is completely adjustable and up to you. Craigslist has a “free” section where a simple word search for “sofa” can generate many options if you’re willing to pick up the items. Beyond the Internet, there are still the options of yard sales, thrift shops, and other used furniture stores.

Many businesses and hospitals donate old furniture to nonprofit organizations after remodeling or redecorating. Additionally, donations of furniture and household items may come from young men involved in the Project and Community Advisory Board members. Not only can excellent bargains be found through donated goods, but used furniture has a nicely worn quality that helps make the space feel instantly “lived in.”

**Characteristics of a good Project space**

_The following are characteristics of a good Project space._

**Welcoming and homey**  Whatever option your organization chooses for its space, we cannot stress enough that from the start the space should be welcoming to all newcomers who walk through the door. While the physical space does not dictate the atmosphere of a Project’s space, this remains an important point to remember when creating space for your Project.

An ideal Project space should feel like a home—cozy, warm, easy to relax in, and a place where guys will want to hang out to socialize. Having music playing in the background helps create a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere. The furnishings are another key to creating this atmosphere. Funky, used furniture from yard sales is more likely to create a comfortable feeling than new, perfectly coordinated office furniture.

Homey touches, including framed pictures of core group members or participants, plants, and artwork can really help create a comfortable feel for the space.

Remember that the images and furnishings in your space should reflect the diversity of the young gay/bisexual men in your community. Bright colorful paints can add warmth to a dark room, and inexpensive mirrors can be hung to give the appearance of windows in enclosed spaces.

**Supporting pride**  It is also important to use the space thoughtfully in order to support pride in the young men. The space can have pictures of young gay/bisexual men being proud of who they are. As mentioned earlier, if the Project is ethnic-specific (for example, for young Black gay/bisexual men), then having photos of men of that ethnic/racial group can be used to promote pride. For example, the space can show Black gay leaders, or positive images of Black gay men.
Versatile

If a single space is used for all Project activities, then it must be highly versatile. Since the space must be appropriate for M-groups and other meetings, office work, and Social Outreach Events, we have found that what works best is to have several rooms within the space that can be used for particular functions. At the minimum, the space should have a work area for the staff that includes a place to store Project materials, and a larger, more informal space for meetings and socializing. The more versatile the space is, the easier it is for the Project to offer a variety of Social Outreach Events on site. For example, we have transformed the same Project space into an art gallery, party room, discussion group setting, video party space, and even a haunted house for Halloween.

Low maintenance

Since there will be a considerable amount of foot traffic in the Project space, with participants coming and going and different activities occurring back-to-back, the space must be relatively easy to keep clean and presentable. Hardy plants and sturdy furnishings that require minimal upkeep are ideal. Several Projects have had success asking a volunteer or a team of volunteers to help out with cleaning or maintenance on a regular basis, but other Projects found it works better to schedule certain days for housekeeping or yard clean-up. In addition to getting lots of work done, these events also served a social and community-building purpose.

Functional

The Project space must serve a variety of functions, so it should be set up in such a way that it allows different activities to occur at the same time. The Project staff will need a relatively quiet space where they can work on individual tasks such as keeping records, preparing reports, and planning agendas. One room is needed that is large enough to accommodate up to 15-20 people for Core Group meetings. This room could also double as the space for Social Outreach Events and drop-in periods. Although it is not always possible, there is a real advantage to finding a space with a kitchen.
This simplifies the job of preparing and storing refreshments for Project participants and can be used for Social Outreach Events. For example, some of the Mpowerment Projects have regular Sunday dinners for participants. Food is always a big draw, so the meal itself is a social event and an opportunity for community-building. Following the meal, the men then take part in a community forum on a given topic. At our Project sites, we have usually rented spaces that were between 1,500 to 2,000 square feet.

**Promotes safer sex** The Mpowerment Project helps young gay/bisexual men expand their social networks. Yet this increased social contact does not guarantee that young gay/bisexual men will feel more supported or that group norms will now favor safer sex. In fact, the norms in the larger young men’s community tend to favor risk-taking with sex and drugs. It is critical, therefore, that as young gay/bisexual men develop closer social ties through Project activities, the Project influences them to support one another in practicing safer sex.

Since so many young gay/bisexual men will enter the space, the space itself becomes an excellent opportunity for promoting safer sex. By having some safer sex posters on the walls, bowls of condoms and lubricants on the tables and in the bathroom (where young men can take them privately), and pamphlets, magazines, books, and videos available that feature safer sex, the Project environment contributes to supporting a norm that encourages safer sex among those who pass through the space.

At the same time, however, too many safer sex posters can be overwhelming and may result in guys believing that AIDS prevention is the sole purpose of the organization. Some men may be turned off by posters that are too sexually explicit, especially if many of them are on display. Therefore, you may want to balance safer sex posters with more “generic” posters. Gay positive images of pride parades, marches, and so forth may create pride among Project participants and help some men feel more comfortable about their sexuality. Of course not all posters or artwork have to have a deeper meaning. Art for its own sake is also a good thing in any Project space.
It is important to use a variety of materials and images so you will reach different segments of the young gay/bisexual men’s community in your area. It is extremely important to have posters depicting men of color rather than just white men in order to make men of color feel comfortable at the space. If you are trying to reach young gay men of color, it is important to avoid showing groups of men in which you have only one man of each ethnic group mixed in. This is often not seen as very authentic to men of color. Instead, show men of color with each other, or photos with several men from each ethnic group represented. If the Project is specifically focused on one ethnic/racial group, then show men of that group in the photos, but also always considering diversity within that group.
The table below contains a list of catalogs that offer safer sex posters, videos, and other materials. Project volunteers can also develop high-quality, customized safer sex promotional materials that can be displayed in the Project space. These can be cute “cut and paste” collage style posters or more sophisticated materials developed with a computer software package (e.g., Photoshop, InDesign) and a scanner. Materials can also be found on the Web by conducting a Google image search for “safe sex poster” or “safer sex poster.” Having Project participants create their own sex-positive, gay-positive, and ethnic/racial group-positive materials can be an extremely empowering process for the volunteers, and this process helps the volunteers internalize the HIV prevention messages. Additionally, displaying the materials in the Project space helps give them a sense of pride and accomplishment.

| Safe-sex/HIV prevention poster resources: Where good posters can be found |
|------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| The San Francisco AIDS Foundation | SFAF maintains an online gallery of poster, postcard and brochure images from prevention campaigns dating back to 1980. In the event that their URL changes, look for the “campaign gallery.” |
| GMHC | GMHC has a number of materials and merchandise available for sale. |
| AIDS Committee of Toronto | ACT maintains a resource list of targeted posters and brochures that can be ordered for near cost. |
| California AIDS Clearinghouse | This Clearinghouse (for CA organizations only) is a good source for posters and brochures. |
| National Prevention Information Network | The HIV/AIDS pages of the National Prevention Information Web site are designed to facilitate the sharing of information and resources on HIV and AIDS for all individuals searching for prevention information. All publications available from NPIN are free of charge; however, quantities are limited. |
Providing resources

The Project space can also serve an important function as an informational resource, linking young men who come to the center with available services within the community. It is useful for the center to maintain a current directory of referral agencies and services on such topics as medical care, HIV and STD-testing sites, gay-friendly counseling services, substance abuse treatment facilities, and suicide hotlines. If the population that your Project is trying to reach is from a lower socioeconomic background and needs life skills training, then providing referrals to places for emergency housing, obtaining GEDs, and job training may be very important. It may also be helpful to have such organizations come to the space and make presentations about the services they provide. Bulletin boards can display information on housing, jobs, and entertainment, including flyers that advertise relevant local organizations and upcoming events. In addition, it is helpful to have a browsing library of books, magazines, and DVDs of interest to young gay/bisexual men, since this will motivate them to hang out in the Project space.

A discrete exterior

We recommend that the outside of the space have nothing which identifies it as a gay or HIV related organization. This is important for two reasons. First, not all of the men the Project aims to reach would feel comfortable entering—or being seen entering—a building that is visibly identifiable as gay or HIV-related. Many of the young men who are most in need of the Project’s services may not fully identify as gay or bisexual or be “out” within their community. These men are highly unlikely to walk into a building draped with rainbow flags and pink triangles. Furthermore, not all young men of color identify with such images, since these images are often used in the “mainstream” gay community that sometimes excludes men of color. Likewise, due to the stigma surrounding AIDS and its association with homosexuality, HIV-related signs and symbols should be avoided. This also fits with the Guiding Principles, which caution that many young men do not want to go to AIDS prevention activities.

A second important reason for maintaining a discreet exterior is for safety. Unfortunately, in many communities there are homophobic individuals who are prone to attack and destroy anything they perceive as representing or promoting homosexuality. A building that is clearly identified as a young gay/bisexual men’s center may become a target for vandalism and homophobic attacks, and may threaten the safety of Project participants inside the space or walking to and from it. For this reason, it is important that the outside be safely lit. It should also be free of potentially dangerous elements such as dark passageways, or vegetation and corners that obstruct pedestrians’ views as they enter or leave.
House rules

Feel warm and supportive

The first time that men come to the Project space, we have found that it is helpful to greet them with a smile and a friendly introduction. Then show them around the space, introducing them to whomever is there at the time. Give them a calendar of upcoming events so they can learn what’s happening at the Project, sign them up for an M-group, and/or ask them if they would like to volunteer on a project that matches their interests.

These first impressions are a critical time for newcomers. Their first impression is likely to be a lasting one, and they will probably share this impression with their friends. Unfortunately, sometimes a Project can make a bad first impression on a newcomer. Nothing can turn a person off as quickly as feeling ignored, excluded from the “in group,” or overhearing gossipy or catty comments. No Project wants these kinds of impressions shared throughout the community.

Therefore, we suggest you make sure that community-building is always seen as the Project space’s first and most important priority. In order to maintain this positive atmosphere, the Coordinators and Core Group members need to vigilantly watch their own and others’ attitudes. M-Project in Wilton Manors, Florida created a set of house rules, adapted from the M-group, which they displayed prominently in the house.

- "Confidentiality" means that private or sensitive information shared at the Project space is not repeated outside of the group without that person’s permission.
- "Use ‘I’ Statements" means that you discuss what you feel on a topic, rather than speaking in general terms about what most people think.
- "Mutual Respect" means that you listen to others in a respectful manner, whether you agree with them or not. It is natural to disagree sometimes. By respecting others, you make it safe for everyone to express differing viewpoints and opinions. This also enables diverse opinions and views to be expressed. It also means that diversity in all senses of the word is both accepted and respected.
- "Have Fun!" means that the Project's activities should be fun and enjoyable. The work we are doing is important, but be careful not to become overly serious while doing it.

Their intention was that the rules be adhered to in all activities at the space. These guidelines were discussed at Project meetings and raised when conflicts arose. Often Coordinators spoke privately with Project participants when their comments became too negative or when they began to form cliques. When feedback was given in a friendly and supportive manner, the
In many Mpowerment Projects, house rules are often reviewed at the start of Project meetings.

Participants usually responded positively to the gentle reminder that the Project space needs to be welcoming, inclusive, and safe for everybody. Such an atmosphere is crucial to the Project’s most important goal of building community. In many Mpowerment Projects, house rules are often reviewed at the start of Project meetings.

It is important for all participants to know and feel confident that private and sensitive information they reveal during activities held at the Project’s space will not be repeated elsewhere in the community. In addition, when conflicting ideas are presented during meetings, it may be important to remind participants about the need for mutual respect. Although ultimately it is always the responsibility of the Project Coordinators to address such concerns, ideally Core Group members and other active volunteers will also share responsibility for reinforcing the house rules. Project staff and volunteers can be effective role models of these rules, but sometimes the issues may need to be aired in direct discussions. From time to time, Coordinators may have to speak with Core Group members or volunteers privately if they are being disruptive or very negative in their interactions with others.

The rules of the space are clear

Each Project’s staff and implementing organization must determine the rules of their space and clearly communicate these rules to all of the people who use it. The Coordinators or volunteers in charge of each activity are responsible for enforcing the rules. Be sure to post the hours when the space is open for drop-in or meetings. You will also need to decide whom to entrust with keys to the space. Whomever is selected must be reliable, since they will be expected to open the space during those hours. In addition to the generic house rules (See above), we have found that the following guidelines about the Project space are important in making all participants feel comfortable and safe. Mpowerment Projects have not posted these, but have let them be known through discussions the Coordinators have had with Core Group members and volunteers.
Guidelines for the Project space:

- No alcohol or drugs are allowed in the space.
- Individuals who disrupt meetings or activities may be asked to leave.
- No sexual behavior is permitted at the space.
- No one is allowed to spend the night at the space.
- No firearms, knives, or other dangerous articles are permitted in the space.
Each Project's staff and implementing organization must determine the rules of their space and clearly communicate these rules to all of the people who use it.
Together creating community for friendship for health for life

mpowerment.org

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