

# Membership Committee

## Community engagement on our name

Background Paper

14 May 2019

Considering the Strategic Plan of Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras (SGLMG), we will consult with members and the wider community to discuss and identify a more inclusive name for the organisation. We commit to engage with members openly, honestly and genuinely to ensure all views are heard.

A clear and inclusive process will help determine what the community see as the main values of the organisation, what moniker will encompass inclusion and pride, what words the community associate with their identity, and how a possible new name will retain the foundations of the Mardi Gras on a global scale and for future members.

### Why are we consulting the community?

This document considers the history of the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, the reasons for this project, in line with the Strategic Plan which sets out the vision of our organisation for the next three years - [you can read it here](#). Current community sentiment is provided as anecdotal feedback received by the Membership Committee.

This consultation will take the time it needs to receive a wide range of feedback to take back to SGLMG members for a decision in 2019.

As a first step in the engagement process, this backgrounder will be shared with members and the interested community. The document will also be published on the SGLMG's website.

### So what are we about to do?

Considering our legacy, the history and the diversity of our community, our task is to reflect on the name of our organisation; to consult our members, and the wider community, on the most appropriate name for the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, with a preferred name to be endorsed by members in 2019.

### What do we think a name should reflect?

A name can do many things. It can:

- Acknowledge the history of Mardi Gras
- Point to the social justice outcomes achieved by the festival
- Represent the LGBTQI+ communities

It is important we are clear and upfront on what the name change options should represent.

The organisation feels the following are essential:

1. The name should align to the organisation's values.
2. The name should reflect the geographical origin of the organisation, Sydney.
3. The name should reflect the brand equity and legacy of the term 'Mardi Gras'.
4. The name should take into account the future developments of our communities.

## History

The name SYDNEY GAY AND LESBIAN MARDI GRAS has been a topic of debate for many years now.

In 2013 the Mardi Gras team sought to change the name without community consultation.

Members pushed back on the initiative to retile the organisation 'Sydney Mardi Gras'. 62% of members surveyed at that time however agreed that community conversations about naming would continue into the future.

That wasn't the first time our Mardi Gras name had been considered.

The increasing involvement of women at Mardi Gras in the late 1980s reached the point where lesbians represented 25% of the membership.

Following a Special General Meeting in December 1988, the name of the Sydney Gay Mardi Gras Association was officially changed to include the word 'Lesbian'.



**MARDI GRAS VOTES FOR LESBIANS**

**At a Special General Meeting on 6 December, members of the Sydney Gay Mardi Gras Association voted 88 to 20 in favour of the proposal to change the Association's name to "Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras".**

The meeting listened to about 45 minutes of debate, as speakers took turns to support and oppose the motion. Though passionate at times, the discussion was without the bitterness which some Association members were predicting would erupt.

As a constitutional change, the proposal required a 75% majority to be passed. The motion was put by Association Secretary Colin Fawcett and seconded by Treasurer Cath Phillips.

Speakers in favour of the proposal argued "lesbian" was the word by which lesbians themselves wished to be known, that it was important lesbian visibility be raised in the general community, and that political unity between gay men and lesbians was vital to the future of both.

Speakers opposing the name change argued "gay" already promoted the necessary unity between men and women, that the name change was cumbersome and would hamper the marketability of Mardi Gras, and that many women preferred to call themselves 'gay'.

At the end of the debate, Cath Phillips said "gay" had a proud history and that lesbians had no wish to "take over" Mardi Gras. "What we have in common" she said, "is that we're all 'queer'. Mardi Gras is the greatest celebration of queerness in this part of the world."

After the voting, President Murray McLachlan gave an update on planning for next year's Mardi Gras. He predicted the name change would make next year's Mardi Gras the best ever, anticipating a record 12,000 at the Party

and 150,000 for the Parade.

Decorations in Oxford St will be receiving special attention. The Burdekin Hotel has agreed to display a 12 metre banner on its facade from mid February, and negotiations are underway with other venues on the parade route. Sponsorships are presently being sought at around \$350 to \$400 a shot to fund 30 enormous flags which will be flown along the route.

The Festival will be expanded presenting 40 events, many of them outdoors, over the first 19 day in February. While it is being described as a "Holiday Festival" with highlights including a women only "Back to Lesbos" party on Rodd Island, and an inaugural one day fair in Prince Alfred Park near Central Station, there will be a serious side as well.

Mardi Gras will be joining with ACON and the People Living with AIDS group to hold the first "Living Well" conference in NSW at Belvoir St Theatre. Other forums will be addressing issues such as drug use in the gay and lesbian communities, and the problems faced by young and ethnic gays.

However, towards the end of the meeting it was clear at least one issue — the Committee's policy not to

## Online conversation

The inclusivity of the name of the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras comes up as a topic of discussion regularly on social media. This has intensified in recent years as Mardi Gras works with the strengthening bisexual, transgender and other sexuality and gender diverse groups. Following are some posts discussing the issue.



@sydneymardigras - why just gay and lesbian? Not hating on you. I'm curious to know why it's not got a more inclusive name like "LGBTQ?"

12:52 PM · Dec 3, 2017 · Twitter for iPhone



Replying to @sydneymardigras

Thanks for the gesture, but could you try removing "Gay and Lesbian" from your name? It's pretty disheartening. Not to mention the bi-erasure in promo and programming. Thanks. ❤️💜💙

10:29 AM · Sep 23, 2018 · Twitter for Android

7 Likes



Replying to @sydneymardigras and [redacted]

**prove it. change the name.**

5:27 PM · Oct 6, 2018 · Twitter for iPhone

*Mardi Gras* is incredibly important to the LGBTQIA+ communities, but the 'Gay and Lesbian' part of the name is out dated and no longer reflects the event's values or purpose. The name doesn't reflect the diversity of the event's audience or participants anymore, and actively excludes many vulnerable groups in a way that adds to the damaging erasure that the *Mardi Gras* is trying to redress in the broader Australian society.

In the spirit of this years '40 Years of Evolution' theme we respectfully ask you to engage in a consultation process with the communities and change the name to better reflect the community and it's needs. Possibly just changing it to simply *Mardi Gras* to allow room for the ever evolving understanding of gender and sexual diversity.



Why change something that isn't broken



Replying to @ALGArchives and @sydneymardigras

Now if they could make it truly **inclusive** by including the other **sexualities** in the name

**This conversation is taking place around the world**

Mardi Gras isn't the only organisation grappling with honouring the history of its name, while recognising the need to represent the communities we are serving. Other groups, here and around the world, are on a similar path.



**The evolution of San Francisco Pride's name:**

1979-1981: **Gay Freedom Day**

1981-1995: **International Lesbian & Gay Freedom Day Parade**

1995-2019: **San Francisco Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Pride Celebration**

February 19, 2019 at 12:16 pm EDT | by James Wellemeyer

## GLCCB changes name to Pride Center of Maryland

f 59 |  |  |  |  < 59 SHARES



The Baltimore-based GLCCB is now known as the Pride Center of Maryland. (Photo public domain)

The board of the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Community Center of Baltimore and Central Maryland (GLCCB) voted on Feb. 7 to officially change its name to the Pride Center of Maryland.

## Some feedback to date

Since the committee started a conversation in 2019 about the best name for our organisation, we have received hundreds of emails. The responses include 'please keep our current name'; to 'please change the name'. Shown below is just a small number of comments.

We are committed to a conversation and capturing everyone's thoughts, ideas and issues.

## Quotes:

*"I think a name change makes sense and the time is now. The organisation has a strong brand and people already associate Mardi Gras with LGBTIQ communities. The current name is not inclusive particularly for gender diverse people and young people that identify with fluid and diverse identities. I believe that 'Sydney Mardi Gras' would provide a more inclusive name that has already built strong broader community awareness of its LGBTIQ mission. A tag line could be added such as 'celebrating LGBTIQ communities' (this would need a lot more work and consultation). Ensuring consultation with young people should be prioritised to ensure the relevance and future of the organisation."*

*"I identify as a gay man but feel it is important that SGLM is an inclusive organisation and so if members of our community feel excluded because of the name their concerns need to be taken into account and taken seriously. I like the current name personally but can understand why others may find it exclusive. Organisations evolve and change as do their names and so I would have little objection to having a more inclusive name. I really do not feel comfortable as a gay man telling someone who is trans or bisexual or intersex, for instance, that there should not be a name change when they feel the name excludes them. Everyone should have a voice but I particularly want to hear from those people who do not feel included by the current name. This is a valuable and important discussion and one I have been pondering a lot lately. If change makes the organisation more inclusive and it makes people feel more included then I'm all for it. Thank you for your hard work and for listening."*

*"Hi I agree with what you are doing and looking into Mardi Gras is great – just need to see how to make the prefix more inclusive?? Sydney LGBT Mardi Gras?? I am a married Bisexual man and love Mardi Gras and all the comes with the celebration. Good luck with the consultation Regards and thanks for all you do for the LGBT community"*

*"I'm not entitled to speak for any of the groups of people who might feel less included by the current name. But I'd like to let you know that, personally, I'm totally comfortable with changing the name if it makes more of our people feel more included."*

*"oh please no don't change the name! Gay & lesbian is inclusive of everyone!"*

*"In relation to changing the name of Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, I think if the goal is to be more inclusive, we should change the name to something along the lines of "LGBTQI" pride or "LGBTQI Mardi Gras", I think by removing "Gay and Lesbian" or any queer connotation, denies LGBTQI people of this experience that celebrates THEM. It is not an event to celebrate Heteronormativity (Although they are welcome to attend), it's an event to celebrate the queer community, their challenges and unique stories. The suggested name change to "Sydney Pride" or "Sydney Mardi Gras" denotes that it not an LGBTQI event and discounts the struggle we went through to get this place of celebrating queer culture."*

*"Thank you for giving me the opportunity to reply. I strongly feel you have all worked so hard in bringing the community together that has had a major impact of breaking down the barriers when it comes to sexuality. Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras name stands for a great deal and should not be changed. It's about freedom, expression, love, families, understanding, hope and togetherness. It gives families the opportunity to express how so very proud we are of our children and their sexuality. Keep building on what you have already achieved. Don't change who you are you don't need to."*

*"I'm all completely here for changing the name of The Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras in the name of making it more inclusive to our entire LGBTIQ community. I would hate to see the term 'Mardi Gras' removed, and love the use of the word of the word 'pride'. So 'The Sydney PRIDE Mardi Gras' sounds like a good option to me!"*

*"Thanks for asking for our feedback, I think Sydney Pride or Sydney Mardi Gras are wonderful inclusive name changes :)"*

*"I totally agree. Visible and explicit inclusivity feels so important right now, especially when, for example, groups claiming to be 'for' gay rights make statements that are anti-trans and incredibly harmful to the movement. As someone who is bi and gender fluid, I myself prefer 'queer' as a term, though I know not everyone does. I am very glad you are looking into this! It's a step forward. Thank you."*

## The community consultation process has started and we look forward to your views

We're continuing to gather feedback from our communities about our name. To comment and be part of the conversation, see the activities below.

Community engagement activities will be undertaken from June to early August.

The activities will include

- Focus groups
- Pop-up stalls at selected locations/events around Sydney,
- An online survey of members and interested LGBTQI+ communities,
- An invitation for visual submissions to accompany a suggested name,
- Meetings with volunteer/community stakeholders.

We will be summarizing everything that is raised. We will be transparent and publish the reports and suggestions on our website.

We greatly appreciate your time and involvement and happy to answer any questions.

Yours sincerely,

The Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras' Membership Committee  
[membership@mardigrasarts.org.au](mailto:membership@mardigrasarts.org.au)