The Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Advisory Committee (LGBTAC) of the Human Rights Commission is mandated by statute to advise and advocate for LGBT people in San Francisco. The Committee is highly regarded for its history of advancing the civil rights of LGBT people in San Francisco and serving as a model for other cities and states in matters pertaining to the civil rights of the LGBT communities. The committee provided early advocacy for domestic partners policy, was instrumental in advocating for one of the first statutes to protect the civil rights of transgendered people, authored an historic ordinance to protect the rights of LGBT people within the San Francisco school district, and has implemented the Equal Benefits Ordinance. In Fiscal Year 1999-2000, the Advisory Committee began to work on a long-range goal to facilitate projects that improve the economic condition of LGBT people in San Francisco, and voted to form a Task Force on LGBT Economic Empowerment.

LGBT Economic Empowerment is an umbrella term that refers to all the efforts that help LGBT individuals, and the community as a whole, become economically self-reliant and lead fully actualized, sustainable lives in San Francisco. Economic Empowerment is based on the premise that, contrary to the generally-accepted myth, the LGBT community is not universally wealthy, but rather is economically diverse. Furthermore, the community’s economic condition is inextricably linked to its civil rights and acceptance by society: social, political and economic advancement are interrelated in that progress on one front cannot be achieved without progress on another. While the community has survived eons of discrimination, endured a major plague, and won many political and legal battles, our community continues to struggle for equality and equal opportunity in housing, employment, education, health care, and other areas. Thirty years after the birth of the modern LGBT civil rights movement, we still do not have a clear sense of our economic well-being (e.g., income, occupation, housing status, domestic partnership status), nor do we fully understand the implications of the costs of being lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (e.g., discrimination, self-destructive behavior, familial abuse and/or disinheritance, relocation to a tolerant city, choice of occupation in tolerant low-paying professions, etc.).

We recognize that LGBT people come to San Francisco because they are attracted by an historical tolerance for our community. In this respect, San Francisco is an "Ellis Island" for many queer people. More than twenty years after the death of Harvey Milk, our community is at a critical turning point in San Francisco. We are positioned as a permanent part of this city. Yet, we face many obstacles to becoming active, welcome participants in the economy, and in society in general. Therefore, the time has come to identify our economic needs, discuss our strengths and weaknesses, develop strategic alliances with those already working towards economic justice, and create new, progressive strategies to advance our economic status. We believe that every LGBT person should have affordable housing, the best job to fit their abilities, the education that assists their life goals, health services that accommodate their special needs, and support if they encounter discrimination. LGBT people should feel comfortable and encouraged to live in San Francisco, so that our population cannot only maintain itself, but also continue to grow, gain political clout, and advance our civil rights.
The Economic Empowerment Task Force will work with the LGBT community to identify and articulate the economic needs and aspirations of our community. We recognize that the LGBT community contains people of all ages, races, socioeconomic backgrounds and sexual identities, and we advocate for equal opportunity for everyone in our community in the areas of job training, employment, education, residential and commercial housing, investment and business loan assistance, and culturally sensitive health care. We maintain that all LGBT people do not presently have access to existing government, non-profit or commercial services because: (1) there is inadequate outreach to our community, and (2) we have not articulated how these agencies can adequately reach and serve our community. Furthermore, we believe that the community has not adequately addressed ways in which it might employ economic development strategies to become more self-reliant.

The ultimate goal of the Economic Empowerment Task Force is to open access to existing services and to facilitate the development of new infrastructure or projects, as needed, to ensure that LGBT people find it economically feasible to remain in San Francisco for their entire lives. We will work with individuals and organizations that are already working in the area of economic empowerment, offering to convene them as a task force to improve their efficiency. Examples of such work that the LGBT Advisory Committee embraces include the EQ Development Group, and the Mayor's Office of Community Development's recent efforts to improve LGBT access to their funded projects. We also anticipate that the new Community Center may become a focal point for these and similar projects that help our community. The Committee pledges to advocate for the above projects, and to help secure City support for projects that meet the goals of improving our economic empowerment, self-reliance and sustainability.

COMMITTEE SURVEY

In order to get some idea of economic demographics and concerns, the Task Force designed and distributed a survey to the full membership of the LGBTAC. Acknowledging that the survey results were in no way scientific, and that the membership could not be considered truly representative of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender communities, the instrument was useful in identifying issues and concerns and in involving the membership in the project in a more personal way. The survey is attached to this report.

Information About Survey Respondents

Eleven (11) people out of 19 members responded to the survey, and contributed additional answers during Committee meetings. Eighty percent of the respondents were Caucasian, ten percent were Asian and Pacific Islanders, and another ten percent were people of color. Seventy percent identified as gay and ten percent identified as queer. Males comprised sixty percent of respondents and thirty percent were female. Ten percent of the respondents were trans-identified. There was no one under twenty. Two are between 20-29 years old, two are between 30-39, four were between 40-49 years old and one was over 50. Educational background of respondents include: fifty percent have BS degrees or some BS credits, forty percent have masters or some other graduate work, and ten percent are on the doctorate level or have some post masters work. As for the time the respondents have lived in the City: forty percent have lived in San Francisco for about 1 to 4 years. Ten percent have lived in the City for about 4 to 8 years. Another ten percent have lived in the City for about 9 to 18 years; and forty percent have lived in the City for more than 18 years.
The Committee again noted that the demographic data gathered from these 11 responses do not show a cross section of the LGBT community. It was suggested that other means of gathering information be used, such as a focus group. It was observed that if this group has encountered obstacles, certainly other less privileged groups have probably encountered more obstacles.

**The survey responses reflect that almost all of the Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender community has experienced discrimination.** The Task Force cumulated the responses and reported at a series of LBTAC meetings, as follows:

**Economic background, past and future**
- Respondents are lower middle or upper middle class and most aspire to be middle class.
- A question is raised by the Respondents' belief that the LGBT community is spread equally across classes.
- The responses suggest that within the LGBT community there is some difficulty in answering questions about economics. Asking “what access does your class afford you?” might yield a more valuable response.

**The relationship of economics to employment**
- Employment is a good way to affect one's economic status.
- All respondents felt that their job choices were affected by being LGBT because of experienced and feared discrimination; consequently, greater legal protection is needed.
- Respondents reported that most of their jobs were found through informal networks, which raises the question of the necessity of formal networks if informal networks are insufficient.

**The relationship of employment to education**
- There was not much of a range in responses to questions about the relationship of employment and education, perhaps due to similarity in the educational opportunities available to Committee members.

**How economic status affects financial resources**
- This question was answered least well, perhaps because it was not understood.
- We need more education about the resources to which other groups have access.
- We are at the beginning of the curve in response to economic inequities; we must go further than boycotts.

**The relationship of economic status and security**
- Respondents made a strong connection between economic status and security, suggesting that LBGTLGBT people must pay greater attention than some groups to protecting their economic status.

**General observations**
- There is very little empirical data on the economic status of LGBT people.
- More programs are needed in this area to provide education about financial resources and common definitions, and to identify the economic empowerment issues facing the LGBT community.

The question of economic empowerment is not solely a problem, but is also an opportunity to identify the LGBT community’s strengths, learn from the models in other communities, and create resources that go beyond governmental programs.
Discussion took place regarding the economic impact of Costco and chain stores. It was suggested that instead of reacting from a crisis mode, such as boycotting, the LGBT community could learn from other communities that have had a positive role in community development.

Regarding economically empowered communities, it was noted that place-based models that simultaneously address housing, employment, education and social services have worked, but that this approach may not be as successful in the LGBT community because we aren’t all in the same place. Ethnic groups and family networks cultivate economic empowerment and the LGBT “family” could create formal networks such as the LGBT Community Center. A successful model of resource development is demonstrated by the Commission’s formal assistance to the LGBT Community Center in setting goals for issues such as community involvement and outreach. This point has been made by studies such as those examining the success of community resources within the Caribbean Black population.

**Housing and economic background, The Past**

- Respondents made housing decisions based primarily on property owner and roommate comfort with LBGTs, safety from discrimination, and cost.
- Housing was found by walking in the neighborhoods where housing was sought, bulletin boards, rental listing services, and the newspaper.
- Some of the obstacles to finding housing were discrimination encountered as a result of being LGBT, lack of family support for housing assistance such as wedding gifts, and the high cost of housing requiring exhausting savings and selling possessions.

**Housing and economics, The Present**

- Acceptance and safety remain primary criteria in housing decisions, so San Francisco, especially certain areas, is the most desirable location; however, the prohibitive cost of San Francisco housing makes it difficult, if not impossible, to live here.
- Renters want to become homeowners to reduce the fear of losing their leases and having to try to find other affordable housing.
- Three respondents are happy with their housing, but the reasons are not clear.

**Housing and economics, The Future**

- Most respondents want to remain in San Francisco for LGBT support and safety, but may be unable to due to high housing costs.
- Age and illness could determine whether San Francisco is affordable.
- One respondent intends to relocate to the East Coast for graduate school.

**Suggestions for Improvement**

- Assistance for first-time homeowners.
- Targeted loan programs that are LGBT-friendly.
- Governmental protections around LGBT youth shelter, zoning and development, tenant rights.
- Community organizing and information sharing around diversity in a large city, desirable neighborhoods and good property owners, regional politics, and how to handle economic empowerment.

**Key Questions**

- Why are some people happy with their housing?
- What strategies will improve housing affordability and encourage residency in San Francisco?
- What other housing needs are not addressed by survey?
Issues raised in committee discussion included:

- Many people must have roommates to afford housing.
- Legislated residency requirements could be changed to allow people who can’t afford to live in San Francisco to be members of the LGBTAC.
- San Francisco risks its diversity if it fails to address housing cost issues.
- San Francisco is becoming polarized into “haves” and “have-nots.”

Economics and Health:

- Greater response is necessary to accurately represent the LGBT community.
- Some of the obstacles facing LGBT people are lack of health information on lesbian and bisexual women around sex and transgenders, substance abuse, mental health problems, lack of care, absence of domestic partner benefits, and “managed care” approach to providing healthcare.
- Seven respondents did not note any impact of health on economic empowerment; however, one respondent pointed out that immigration status is dependent on remaining HIV-.
- The respondents expressed concern about discriminatory attitudes in healthcare providers.

Employment and Education

Excerpts of answers to relevant questions were reported as follows:

*How did being LGBT affect your choice (or lack of choice) for employment?*

- All respondents wrote being LGBT had an impact. A respondent wrote it is "important to be comfortable in the workplace." Another wrote, "I didn't want to set myself at odds with a 'judging' status quo." Another respondent wrote, "The desire to make a difference was strongly influenced by my orientation."

*What networks/resources/programs did you use to find a job?*

- Other than the usual "colleagues, contacts from past jobs, temp agencies, internet, job ads", respondents cited the Women's Building and the Lavender Pages as resources.

*What would help you improve your job situation?*

- Some responses included: "more queer-run enterprises", "more formal outreach programs coming from the LGBT community, like career and housing groups at our new community center", "more sensitivity training and awareness."

*Do you consider your job ideal?*

- Out of nine respondents, seven wrote their jobs were satisfactory. One respondent wrote that there is a need to have more support for LGBT people.

*Did or does your status as LGB and/or T affect the amount of education you received or want to receive?*

- Six respondents out of nine wrote 'no'. One respondent wrote, "Being at the university was kind of a good hiding place." Another respondent wrote, "because of sexual orientation status I had to quit high school."

*Have you encountered instances of individual, societal, or legal discrimination and how has that affected your employment and educational opportunities?*
Seven out of nine respondents wrote 'yes'. One respondent was not considered for a job in San Francisco because he was an 'out' gay man. Another respondent wrote that excessive emotional anxiety resulted in quitting the job.

*What kind of public and private resources are needed to enhance economic empowerment in the LGBT community?*

- Responses included: "a survey of LGBT-friendly places to work"; "protections against employment discrimination especially by public entities"; "public research identifying the needs and unique problems of LGBT people before public/private resources can be created"; "a non-profit center that helps LGBT people adjust to living and being LGBT in San Francisco and maintaining those adjusting skills."

Discussion highlights: The LGBT Community Center seems to be one of the more feasible sites the community can use to contribute to its economic empowerment. City College is in negotiations with the community center to provide training classes and certainly job searching and counseling will be part of these training classes. Non-profits doing employment work for LGBT youth include Queer Youth Training Collaborative, serving LGBT youth under 18 where CUAV is the lead agency; LYRIC; Young Women's Development; New Village; and Bay Positives. Seven out of nine of the highly accomplished respondents have experienced job discrimination. Focus groups may not be the most effective way of gathering the economic information from the community. If demographic data were collected separately from economic information, there might be more interest from the community to participate in a survey. However, this process may lose relevant data correlation. Focus groups can incorporate questions inquiring about the inappropriateness and offensiveness of questions pertaining to economic information.
RECOMMENDATIONS

The Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Advisory Committee recommends the following:

1. Proceed with community hearings and follow-up hearings with the Board of Supervisors.

2. Seek funding to do a comprehensive study of various facets of the economic condition of the LGBT community. At a minimum, include an assessment of financial status, housing, employment, health-related economic issues, education, and other areas of investigation.

3. Lead the formation of a LGBT community business plan encompassing development strategies for community capital formation, retention and reinvestment.

4. Develop an advocacy plan for outreach to city, state and federal funding sources to better utilize the billions of dollars available to San Franciscans. Include the LGBT community in the utilization of such funds.

5. Incorporate social and political issues of the LGBT community with economic issues and the resultant cultural manifestations, which are not currently well understood. This integration could result in a more holistic understanding of the causes (and cures) of LGBT strife and oppression.