



## OUT & EQUAL 2021 EXFO

# BUDDY PROGRAM

One of the costs of this pandemic has been fewer opportunities to meet and engage with one another in ways that feel truly meaningful. The team at Out & Equal knows that interpersonal connection matters, and over the last year we have hosted small-sized, personal connection groups during this time of largely virtual work, to fight isolation, re-energize and bolster our spirits, and create authentic friendships that sustain us in our professional and personal lives. In the 5000+ person 2020 Summit with 50+% first-time attendees, we launched a “Buddy Program” – a resounding success that facilitated connections in trios for more than 1,000 people.

### **PRAISE FOR THE 2020 SUMMIT BUDDY PROGRAM**

- *“I found it extremely helpful to digest all of the Summit information with a small team. We shared program ideas, stories about company culture and peer advice. My Summit Buddies made me feel connected to organizations outside of my own.”*
- *“The Summit Buddy Program helped to connect me to people that I otherwise might not have met, especially with a virtual conference, and get to understand some other first-timers experiences throughout Summit.”*
- *“This was my first time at Out and Equal and while attending some sessions if I had some uncomfortable questions as an ally, I knew I had my buddies to fall back on! (and trust me, I asked them a lot of questions.)”*
- *“As a first-time summit participant, it was great to have the opportunity to connect with others outside of my organization before, during, and after summit. I look forward to our standing monthly call where we can share how we are pushing new initiatives in the LGBTQ+ space within our organizations. ”*
- *“It was an incredibly fruitful way to expand my network and an opportunity to learn and share best practices in DEI.”*
- *“I’m a huge introvert. The Summit Buddy Program allowed me to connect with two individuals who I otherwise would have not met.”*



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## **We are thrilled to bring the Buddy Program back for 2021 Executive Forum.**

This program will connect you to a few new friends with whom you can share a bit about yourself, dream about the workplaces we want to create, and process your Executive Forum experience before, during, and after the event. Just as you may still be in touch with people you met in the hallways, during a workshop or at an evening networking event of past O&E conferences, we hope the 2021 ExFo Buddy Program helps create lasting friendships, stronger community, and a sense of belonging for all of us.

## **WHAT TO EXPECT**

- Executive Forum registrants who indicated interest in the Executive Forum Buddy Program will be randomly grouped into trios and provided a guide on how to engage in meaningful discussions with your group, how to document your shared goals and experiences, and how to share your experience with us.
- Upon getting your group assignments, please connect with each other and agree to a communication platform for your trio (ex. Google Meet, Zoom, FaceTime, WebEx, etc.) By leaving communications up to the individual groups, we aim to give you the flexibility to drive your own connection and experience!
- Also, there will be prizes for participation! Out & Equal will send a program survey/questionnaire to each person who participated in the program one month after the conclusion of Executive Forum. This short questionnaire will focus on your participation in the program, stories of value/ learning/connections, and any general reflections – there are no wrong answers! Upon completion of the survey, all people who submit will be entered in a drawing: We are giving away five \$50 dollar gift cards, and may feature stories about the impact your new connections have had on you/your career on the Out & Equal website (with permission).

## **MEETING RECOMMENDATIONS**

- We recommend each group tries to meet 2-3 times to make the most of this experience and cement your connection with one another: at least once before and once after Executive Forum. Schedule your first meeting as soon as you can.
- Participants should commit to showing up and thoughtfully connecting with one another.
- Not all groups may feel (at first or ever) like fast-friendships or likely professional connections and that's Ok. The guide questions are offered to allow you to share yourselves and your stories, and to hear others' – and that may in fact mean connecting with, and learning from, people in a wide variety of ways. Be open-minded to connection, and to the magic of what can happen when you stop to listen to someone who might have a much different experience or story than your own.



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- By design, we are not designing or matching participants in any specific ways. We believe that random assignment will allow for the focus to be on human connection rather than any one preconceived idea about who would make the “best connection.”
- Be brave: If it feels right to do so, consider sharing about yourself personally. This will give others permission and confidence to do the same.
- Keep all conversations confidential. What happens in your groups should stay in your groups – just like Vegas! Avoid video recordings or taking photos of your Zoom screens. Memorializing your group in a screen shot may be ok, but get your colleagues’ permission first! And please maintain confidence of anyone and anything that is shared. When in doubt, ask!
- Make time and space for all participants to speak, contribute, and collaborate. There will naturally be those who are more extroverted, introverted or who always seeks balance. Everyone’s voice is important!
- If you have a less-than-ideal group experience, be patient and flexible. Especially in these times where you and your colleagues might be balancing work with an unusual set of responsibilities and stresses.

## CONVERSATION GUIDE

To get things rolling, we are offering the following questions as a starting place for meaningful, connective, and fun conversations!

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### MEETING #1: HOLD THIS CONVERSATION BEFORE EXECUTIVE FORUM IF POSSIBLE

**Each member should introduce themselves and consider sharing in an “icebreaker” types of conversation. Have fun with these!**

- Your LGBTQ “coming out” or “staying in” story, or a source of your connection to/passion for the LGBTQ community.
- Discuss the meaning of work and a job/career for you personally. What is your “work” story? What values around work were communicated to you growing up? What is one favorite proud career moment? Do you have an important piece of advice you received or gave someone else that made a difference?
- What do you love about the LGBTQ community and our unique “culture” (whatever that means for you)?



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- Favorite LGBTQ book, movie, or television show, and its impact on you personally.
  - Favorite LGBTQ hero: Who have you admired, looked up to, been influenced by, or want to learn more about?
  - What are you most excited about for Executive Forum? What are your hopes and dreams?
  - What are your expectations for Executive Forum? Which sessions and/or speakers are you most looking forward to and why? Do you have goals you want to share? Do you want your Connect group to do an accountability “check in” later on these?
  - If you want to meet up or “chat” during ExFo week, the first meeting is a great time to talk about that!
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## MEETING #2: HOLD THIS CONVERSATION SOMETIME IN THE FEW WEEKS FOLLOWING EXECUTIVE FORUM

### Executive Forum Experience Follow-Up

- How was the week and experience of ExFo?
- How have you been since Executive Forum? What’s new?
- Who were some of your favorite speakers: What thinking did they provoked in you? What spoke to you? Did anything they shared spark a memory or moment that resonated with you personally?
- What workshops did you attend? What did you learn? What have you been left curious with that you’d like to follow up on and/or learn more about?
- What are new or exciting discussions around (identity/allyship/inclusion/ leadership/ intersectionality/etc.) that have either validated or challenged your perspective?
- What did you learn about yourself? What did you learn about others that feels important?
- Did you meet your personal and/or professional goals you had going into Executive Forum?
- Was there anything you and/or your colleagues from your workplace learned that you have already begun to implement or discuss? If not, what’s the first thing you’d like to bring back to work to try and push forward?
- Groups can keep meeting if you’d like to! Now is the time to discuss if you’d like to keep it going, and/or how/when to keep in touch.
- Goodbyes and “gratitudes!”