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BEYOND BINARY

LGBTQ+ RIGHTS IN THE DIGITAL LANDSCAPE

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LGBT Tech is one of the nation's premier organizations working to bridge the technology gap for LGBTQ+ individuals through partnerships with tech companies, non-profit groups, policy makers, scholars, and innovators. Grounded in empirical research, we develop programs and resources that support LGBTQ+ communities and work to educate on the unique needs LGBTQ+ individuals face when it comes to tech.

LGBT Tech's policy education initiatives champion technology policies that prioritize digital equity and address systemic barriers to access, online safety, and representation. From advocating for data privacy protections to combatting algorithmic bias, LGBT Tech's policy work lays the foundation for a more inclusive digital future.

LGBT Tech's programs provide tangible solutions to the digital divide while empowering LGBTQ+ individuals and organizations to navigate and thrive in the digital landscape.

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INTRODUCTION TO THE LANDSCAPE

Welcome to Beyond Binary, a comprehensive look at how the technology landscape of the United States intersects with the specific experiences and needs of LGBTQ+ individuals who rely on it.

For the LGBTQ+ community, digital spaces can prove both empowering and fraught with challenges. Technology acts as a catalyst for community building, economic opportunities, self-expression, and advocacy—while simultaneously posing risks of online discrimination, privacy concerns, and disparities in access. These dual realities define the stakes of this report.

The 2024 election, resulting in the re-election of President Donald Trump, has introduced new dynamics that are expected to significantly impact LGBTQ+ rights, digital policies, and their crucial intersection. Federal policies, state-level initiatives, and private-sector practices all play interconnected roles in shaping the safety, equity, and accessibility of digital spaces for LGBTQ+ individuals.

This report comes at a time when technology and policy are rapidly evolving, with critical decisions being made about online privacy, platform accountability, and digital equity. Against this backdrop, *Beyond Binary* underscores the urgent need to prioritize inclusivity and safeguard digital spaces to ensure LGBTQ+ individuals—and those within other marginalized communities—thrive in an increasingly connected world.
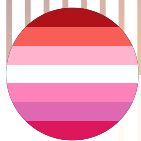
THE COMMUNITY LANDSCAPE

There are millions of LGBTQ+ individuals living in the United States, with a diverse range of identities, experiences, and needs. For many, online spaces are where they connect, learn, and grow. In 2025, ensuring the ability of the LGBTQ+ community to have safe, protected, and authentic technological experiences must be a priority.

In the United States, there are an estimated
20 million LGBTQ+ adults,[1]
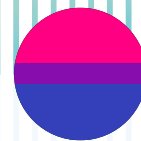larger than the population of 47 of 50 states.
In fact:

There are more **lesbians** than the entire population of **Utah**,

More **gay men** than the population of **Louisiana**,

More **bisexuals** than the population of **Pennsylvania**,

And more **transgender** adults than the population of **Kansas**.[2]

Despite progress in visibility and general acceptance, LGBTQ+ individuals continue to face systemic inequities across multiple facets of life. Discrimination in healthcare leads to inadequate or stigmatized care, while workplace biases create barriers to equitable employment opportunities. LGBTQ+ students often confront harassment, limited representation, and policies that fail to protect their identities. Finding affirming physical spaces and resources, such as community centers or healthcare providers, remains a significant challenge, particularly for those in rural areas or states with anti-LGBTQ+ policies.

In this context and faced with these overwhelming challenges, the LGBTQ+ digital landscape becomes a critical lifeline shaped by the community's unique need for equitable access to healthcare, education, employment, social connection, and information. Reliable digital access is not just a convenience, but a vital resource for navigating the world.

Education

For students, reliable internet and digital devices unlock opportunities for academic growth and success. Research shows LGBTQ+ students often face lower educational expectations and reduced school engagement, but digital tools can bridge this gap. **LGBT Tech polling reveals that 73% of LGBTQ+ adults rely on online platforms for courses and learning opportunities, highlighting the transformative role of connected access.**

Healthcare

Online resources provide lifelines for managing health conditions and accessing affirming care. Telehealth became indispensable during COVID-19, particularly for LGBTQ+ individuals facing discrimination in healthcare settings. **Nearly 44% of LGBTQ+ adults and 70% of transgender adults turn to digital spaces for LGBTQ+-specific health information.**

Employment

Employment opportunities also depend heavily on digital access. LGBTQ+ individuals, particularly those facing workplace discrimination, use online tools to find LGBTQ+-friendly employers and professional networks. **According to LGBT Tech polling, 41% of LGBTQ+ adults and 68% of transgender adults use digital platforms to seek inclusive job opportunities, underscoring the necessity of connectivity in career development.**

Social Connection & Information

Beyond services, digital access fosters community. Online platforms connect 81% of LGBTQ+ adults and 93% of transgender adults with new friends and support networks, providing safe spaces for belonging and growth. **Moreover, 74% of LGBTQ+ adults—and 90% of transgender adults—credit online access with shaping their understanding of their identities. This connectivity empowers LGBTQ+ individuals to engage with their world fully and equitably.[3]**

THE FEDERAL LANDSCAPE

As the United States transitions into a new presidential administration and government unified under the Republican Party, the landscape for digital equity and LGBTQ+ rights is poised to shift in notable ways.

While, historically, changes in leadership have always brought new priorities and policies, the incoming administration has signaled a particular focus on reshaping approaches to technology, online spaces, and civil rights in ways that will affect marginalized communities.

These shifts are likely to have far-reaching implications for the LGBTQ+ community, particularly in areas like data privacy, platform accountability, and protections against discrimination in digital spaces. By navigating these challenges thoughtfully and proactively, there remains an opportunity to advocate for policies that prioritize equitable access and protect the digital rights of all Americans.

This moment underscores the need for collaboration between policymakers, advocates, and industry leaders to ensure that the digital landscape continues to serve as a tool for empowerment and connection.

ISSUES WE'RE WATCHING

As we move into 2025, issues in the federal technology landscape will influence how LGBTQ+ folks in the United States navigate online spaces, engage with digital resources, and contend with potential disparities in access. Lawmakers and leaders on Capitol Hill and at the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), and the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) will play critical roles in tackling many of the following issues, and must do so with consideration for the LGBTQ+ community.

Privacy: The Foundation of Digital Rights

A comprehensive federal privacy framework is urgently needed to establish a strong foundation for protecting all users in the digital age, including LGBTQ+ individuals. Robust privacy protections would safeguard personal data—such as health records, browsing histories, and location information—from exploitation or misuse. For LGBTQ+ individuals, whose personal data can often reveal sensitive information about their identities, the risks of a weak privacy framework are especially dire.[4]

Without a federal standard, existing protections remain inconsistent and insufficient, leaving gaps that undermine other critical areas such as online safety and platform accountability. Federal privacy legislation must address these vulnerabilities while balancing innovation with individual rights. Privacy is not just a policy goal—it is the cornerstone of equity and trust in a connected world.

Digital Discrimination: Equity in Connectivity

Access to reliable internet is a lifeline for LGBTQ+ individuals, connecting them to affirming resources, peer support, and advocacy networks. Yet systemic inequities in broadband infrastructure disproportionately affect marginalized communities, especially in rural and underserved areas. LGBTQ+ individuals in these regions face heightened barriers to participating in the digital economy and accessing essential services.[5] The NTIA's $42 billion Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program offers a chance to close this digital divide,[6] but equity-focused implementation will be critical to ensuring that federal investments benefit those most in need.

Widely publicized proposals for the new administration, including Project 2025, threaten to undermine these efforts by reducing federal investments in broadband and equity initiatives.[7] Such actions risk deepening the digital divide, particularly for LGBTQ+ individuals already marginalized by geography and socioeconomics, and underscore the urgent need to protect equitable access to reliable and inclusive digital infrastructure.

ISSUES WE'RE WATCHING

Section 230: The Foundation of Free Online Speech

Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act underpins the internet's balance between free expression and platform accountability. For LGBTQ+ individuals, this provision has enabled platforms to host affirming content and create safe online communities without fear of over-moderation.[8] However, proposed reforms under the Trump administration threaten to destabilize this delicate balance. Changes to Section 230 could lead to platforms censoring LGBTQ+ voices to avoid liability or, conversely, allowing harmful content such as hate speech and harassment to proliferate.

Rhetoric grounded in claims of "censorship" and efforts to enforce "must-carry" provisions for politically disfavored content, such as anti-LGBTQ+ propaganda, could undermine protections against harassment and misinformation online. Policymakers must carefully consider reforms that preserve free speech while ensuring marginalized communities can safely engage in digital spaces.

Censorship: Preventing LGBTQ+ Erasure in Education & Media

Efforts to censor LGBTQ+ content under the guise of "protecting children" pose a grave threat to representation and equity. By banning books, removing inclusive curricula, and defunding public media, these proposed measures limit access to affirming resources that many, particularly LGBTQ+ youth, rely on for validation and support. As marginalized voices are silenced in traditional spaces, this censorship often extends into the digital realm, where political pressure and vague content regulations can cause platforms to remove or restrict LGBTQ+-affirming materials.[9]

Such censorship undermines the digital landscape as a refuge for marginalized communities. Efforts to align education and media with "patriotic" standards—eliminating discussions of "gender ideology" and "critical race theory"—signal a broader attempt to restrict diverse perspectives across all platforms. This erasure perpetuates stigma, isolates LGBTQ+ individuals, and limits equitable access to information, underscoring the urgent need to protect online visibility and inclusivity.

ISSUES WE'RE WATCHING

Artificial Intelligence: Mitigating Risks & Promoting Equity

Artificial intelligence (AI) is transforming every facet of the digital world, but its rapid adoption raises significant ethical, privacy, and equity concerns. For LGBTQ+ individuals, biases embedded in AI algorithms—such as in facial recognition systems or content moderation tools—can perpetuate exclusion and harm.[10] These risks are compounded by the absence of clear federal guidance, proposals to overturn President Biden's Executive Order on AI, and the new administration potentially shifting focus away from comprehensive oversight.

Thoughtful policymaking must balance innovation with accountability to ensure AI serves all communities fairly, rather than amplifying existing disparities.

Immersive Technology: Unlocking Inclusion in XR

In December 2024, bipartisan federal legislation reflected a growing federal recognition of Extended Reality's (XR) potential across commerce, education, and communication. These technologies also offer immense social potential for LGBTQ+ individuals seeking authentic self-expression and community building, and as the government crafts policies for this emerging field, it is imperative that lawmakers incorporate the same sensitivities, guidelines, and protections that prioritize the needs of marginalized communities.

Encryption: Protecting Digital Security

Encryption is a critical safeguard for personal privacy and secure communication, particularly for LGBTQ+ individuals navigating hostile environments or oppressive policies.[11] It ensures that sensitive conversations, data, and online activities remain protected from unauthorized surveillance. However, proposals to weaken encryption in the name of national security threaten to dismantle these protections, exposing vulnerable communities to exploitation and harm.

A federal commitment to robust encryption standards is essential to safeguarding digital security. Policymakers must resist measures that prioritize surveillance over privacy, recognizing that a secure internet is foundational to equity and trust in the digital ecosystem.

ISSUES WE'RE WATCHING

Spectrum Deployment: Powering the Digital Ecosystem

Spectrum allocation—the infrastructure that powers wireless communication—is essential to modern connectivity. For LGBTQ+ individuals, particularly those in rural or underserved areas, mobile internet is often the primary means of accessing affirming resources, peer networks, and critical services.[12] As the incoming administration takes the reins, its decisions on 5G and next-generation technologies will have a profound impact on the affordability, accessibility, and quality of these digital lifelines. Policies prioritizing underserved populations are critical to addressing persistent gaps in connectivity and ensuring that all communities can participate in an increasingly digital world.

The appointment of FCC Commissioner Brendan Carr as the agency's next chair signals potential shifts in spectrum deployment policy and the federal funding mechanisms that bolster it. Any reduction in funding for broadband equity programs—especially those targeting rural and marginalized communities—seriously risks widening the digital divide, and we urge the FCC to continue prioritizing the investments that reach our communities most in need.

Youth Privacy: Balancing Protection and Autonomy

LGBTQ+ youth rely on digital platforms to access vital health information, peer support, and advocacy networks that may not exist in their offline lives.[13] However, policies limiting youth privacy under the Trump administration risk increasing surveillance and censorship of LGBTQ+ content, isolating young individuals and denying them critical resources.

Thoughtful youth privacy protections must strike a balance between ensuring safety and preserving autonomy. Policymakers should prioritize measures that empower young people to access affirming digital spaces without fear of surveillance or discrimination.

Each of these issues requires urgent attention and thoughtful policymaking to preserve digital rights and equity for LGBTQ+ individuals. On these issues and others impacting the federal technology landscape, LGBT Tech stands as an essential educational resource and advocate, amplifying the community's needs and offering expertise to inform policies that protect and empower LGBTQ+ individuals in the digital age.

THE STATE LANDSCAPE

Despite significant progress in LGBTQ+ rights and strong public support for the community, a glaring gap remains in legal protections at the federal level.

While some states and localities have adopted inclusive policies, there is no comprehensive federal law explicitly protecting LGBTQ+ individuals from discrimination in areas like housing and public accommodations. Protections are often left to state and municipal interpretation—an increasingly precarious reality as state lawmakers continue to push record-breaking amounts of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation.

10 states explicitly define "sex" in state laws to discriminate against transgender individuals.

27 states still allow conversion therapy for minors.

30 states still allow gay or trans "panic" to be used as a defense in court.

24 states have bans on transgender people using the bathrooms or facilities according to their gender identity.

33 states have bans on same-sex marriage that become law if federal same-sex marriage recognition is overturned.

24 states & territories either ban or make a felony access to best practice medication and surgical care for transgender youth.

19 states restrict or outright ban discussions of LGBTQ+ people or issues in school curricula.

21 states allow LGBTQ+ individuals to be refused service, denied entry to, or discriminated against in public accommodations.

17 states do not recognize hate crimes based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

13 states promote or outright require the "outing" of transgender youth in schools.[14]

In 2024, state legislatures across the United States introduced a staggering 574 anti-LGBTQ+ bills, marking a record-breaking year for attacks on LGBTQ+ rights.[15] These bills targeted everything from healthcare access and education to public accommodations, with a particular focus on restricting the rights of transgender individuals. This surge in discriminatory legislation underscores the urgent need for vigilance and advocacy to protect the rights and dignity of LGBTQ+ communities nationwide.

ISSUES WE'RE WATCHING

While federal policies set the tone, many issues see increased attention or unique opportunities for state-level action. The following areas represent several critical intersections of technology, equity, and LGBTQ+ advocacy in 2025 that LGBT Tech is closely following on the state level.

Broadband Equity: Building Inclusive Connectivity

In 2025, broadband expansion projects will break ground across the country, fueled by programs like the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) initiative.[16] While these efforts aim to close the digital divide, inclusivity remains inconsistent across states. An LGBT Tech review of 55 State and Territory Digital Equity Plans revealed that fewer than half explicitly reference LGBTQ+ populations, and only a fraction address the unique challenges these communities face in accessing digital resources.[17]

For LGBTQ+ individuals, broadband access often serves as a gateway to critical services, from telehealth to affirming social networks. States with inclusive digital equity strategies can lead the charge by ensuring broadband expansion prioritizes historically underserved groups. Conversely, states that overlook LGBTQ+ considerations risk perpetuating inequities and leaving millions disconnected. To truly achieve digital equity, states must recognize and address the intersectional barriers faced by LGBTQ+ communities in their broadband policies.

Youth Online: Protecting Users Without Limiting Access

Online safety regulations, including age verification mandates and parental control policies, aim to shield children from harm but often have unintended consequences. In states with anti-LGBTQ+ agendas, these measures can be easily weaponized to restrict access to affirming resources, healthcare information, and peer support networks. The same rhetoric used to ban LGBTQ+-inclusive books and gender-affirming care is now being applied to online platforms, threatening to isolate vulnerable youth.[18]

States must strike a balance between protecting young users and preserving their ability to access critical online spaces. LGBTQ+ youth rely on digital platforms to find support and resources they may not have offline. Efforts to enhance online safety should focus on inclusive solutions, such as digital literacy programs and transparent platform accountability, rather than restrictive policies that perpetuate stigma or erase LGBTQ+ voices under the guise of protection.

ISSUES WE'RE WATCHING

Privacy Protections: A State-Led Imperative

In the absence of comprehensive and national protections like a privacy framework, we encourage state legislators to focus on drafting and passing legislation that provides comprehensive protections for all users, regardless of age, gender, race, or other demographic factors.

In states less supportive of LGBTQ+ rights, weak or nonexistent privacy laws exacerbate vulnerabilities, allowing data exploitation and even targeted surveillance. Privacy protections must go beyond minors and reflect the broader needs of diverse populations. By adopting inclusive privacy policies, states can foster trust in digital ecosystems and set a national example of how to balance innovation with the right to personal safety and autonomy.

Digital Literacy: Empowering Inclusive Education

Digital literacy offers a proactive, flexible approach to addressing online safety and equity. By equipping users with critical thinking skills and fostering open communication, these programs empower youth and adults alike to navigate risks like cyberbullying and privacy threats while accessing affirming resources. States with LGBTQ+-inclusive policies can integrate digital literacy into education systems, teaching young people to evaluate online information and engage safely.

In less inclusive states, restrictive policies risk silencing LGBTQ+ perspectives, even in technology education. Digital literacy programs provide an opportunity to counteract this by offering a platform for inclusion and empowerment. With the ability to adapt to emerging technologies and threats, digital literacy ensures that all youth—regardless of identity—can navigate the digital world confidently and responsibly, fostering a safer and more equitable online environment.

By addressing these areas, states can play a pivotal role in shaping a digital landscape that upholds equity and inclusion for LGBTQ+ individuals, even amidst challenging federal dynamics. LGBT Tech will remain a vital advocate and resource, ensuring that state-level decisions reflect the needs of marginalized communities in the evolving digital age.

Digital equity for LGBTQ+ individuals, as explored throughout this report, begins with access.

Without reliable connectivity, essential devices, robust infrastructure, and the digital literacy to use them effectively, the broader goals of inclusion, advocacy, and opportunity remain out of reach. Access is the foundation upon which digital equity is built.

Connectivity

Reliable connectivity is essential for accessing education, employment, healthcare, and social support systems. High costs and limited service coverage disproportionately impact low-income LGBTQ+ individuals, many of whom depend on public spaces like libraries and community centers for internet access. Expanding affordable broadband services is critical to bridging these gaps and achieving digital equity.

Infrastructure & Spectrum

Broadband infrastructure underpins all reliable internet access, while spectrum allocation ensures wireless connectivity. For rural LGBTQ+ communities, infrastructure improvements and equitable spectrum distribution are critical for reducing isolation and ensuring access to vital services. Balanced investments in these areas can promote inclusive connectivity nationwide.

Devices

Smartphones, tablets, and computers are crucial for participation in the digital world. For LGBTQ+ individuals, especially those from low-income backgrounds, affordability remains a significant barrier. Community spaces like libraries and LGBTQ+ centers play a vital role in providing access to these devices. Legislative attacks on these safe spaces, however, jeopardize this crucial support.

Digital Literacy

Digital literacy enables LGBTQ+ individuals to access essential resources, advocate for their rights, and navigate the online world safely. It is a critical tool for advocacy, personal growth, and economic opportunity. However, many face barriers to acquiring these skills due to limited access to training programs. By prioritizing inclusive digital literacy efforts, communities can empower LGBTQ+ individuals to fully participate in the digital economy and society.

A LOOK AT LGBT TECH PROGRAMS

While LGBT Tech's federal and state policy advocacy fights for systemic change, our programs demonstrate how to meet the LGBTQ+ community's immediate needs head-on. We believe in pairing advocacy with action—talking the talk and walking the walk in equal measure. By centering the community's unique needs, LGBT Tech's programs show how equitable access can be achieved and improved.
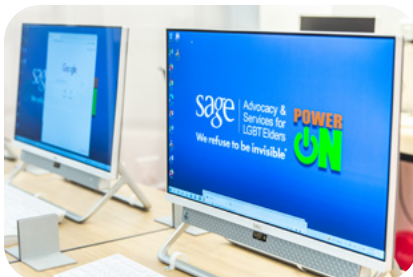
In 2025, the importance of this programmatic work is greater than ever. As the digital divide continues to grow and the reliance on technology deepens, preserving access for LGBTQ+ individuals becomes critical. LGBT Tech is committed to scaling and expanding these efforts, proving that when you listen to the community and invest in their success, the barriers to access can be overcome.

PowerOn Program

poweronlgbt.org

LGBT Tech's flagship initiative, PowerOn, is built on the belief that digital rights are human rights. Its mission is to bridge the digital gap for LGBTQ+ individuals by providing life-changing technology and resources at the grassroots level. PowerOn operates through a robust partner network of 140 LGBTQ+ centers across 40 states and territories, distributing over $500,000 in devices to date.[19]

With the help of PowerOn, over 622,000 LGBTQ+ individuals have accessed essential resources. From securing stable housing to finding employment and connecting with affirming communities online, PowerOn devices have provided LGBTQ+ individuals with the tools to change their lives. Community centers have used these devices to establish computer labs and conduct outreach, showing how technology can transform underserved spaces into hubs of opportunity and support.

A LOOK AT LGBT TECH PROGRAMS

PATHS Program

pathslgbtq.org

The PATHS Program empowers LGBTQ+ youth and young adults to pursue careers in STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics). Through mentorships, grants, and multimedia storytelling, PATHS not only bridges the digital divide but fosters the creation of an inclusive, representative workforce that builds with community in mind.

To date, PATHS has awarded $171,322 in education grants to 40 LGBTQ+ students, hosted 65 mentorships, and garnered over 61,000 views of its web content featuring LGBTQ+ STEAM professionals.[20] By championing representation and equity in STEAM, PATHS inspires young LGBTQ+ individuals to envision—and achieve—futures where they can thrive professionally while making meaningful impacts in their industries.

Digital Navigator Program

digitalnavlgbtq.org

Launched in 2023, the Digital Navigator Program reflects LGBT Tech's holistic approach to bridging the digital divide. Designed based on years of engagement with the LGBTQ+ community, this program ensures individuals not only have access to technology but also the knowledge to use it safely and effectively.

By combining device distribution with digital literacy training and safety resources, the Digital Navigator Program equips individuals with the tools to stay connected and navigate the digital landscape with confidence. As the need for technology continues to grow, this program provides scalable solutions that adapt to the community's evolving needs, ensuring that no LGBTQ+ individual is left behind.

CONCLUSION

As we enter 2025, the digital world stands at a crossroads for the LGBTQ+ community: a continued tool for empowerment, or a potential space of exclusion.

Technology is central to the lives of millions of LGBTQ+ individuals, serving as a critical tool for education, employment, healthcare, social connection, and advocacy. However, systemic barriers, including inequities in access, the threat of censorship, and a lack of comprehensive privacy protections, jeopardize the ability of LGBTQ+ individuals to fully thrive in the digital age.

This report underscores the urgency of addressing these issues with innovative, inclusive solutions. Policymakers, industry leaders, and community organizations must prioritize digital equity by championing robust privacy frameworks, protecting free expression online, and ensuring universal access to reliable connectivity and technology. Simultaneously, state and federal advocacy efforts must counter discriminatory policies that threaten to erase LGBTQ+ voices and visibility from digital and physical spaces alike.

Programs like LGBT Tech's PowerOn, PATHS, and Digital Navigator demonstrate that change is possible through collaboration and community-centered innovation. These initiatives prove that when investments are tailored to the unique needs of LGBTQ+ individuals, the barriers of the digital divide can be overcome, empowering the community to achieve its full potential.

In 2025, the stakes are high—but so too is the opportunity to reimagine a digital landscape that is safer, more equitable, and more affirming for LGBTQ+ individuals. By centering inclusivity and committing to long-term systemic change, we can ensure that the digital world continues to be a platform for connection, growth, and resilience.

The path forward is clear: we must go beyond binary to build a future where every LGBTQ+ person can thrive online and offline.

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