



Allegheny County Department of Human Services

# RFP Response Form

## RFP for Community-Led and Community-Operated Informal Mental Health Supports

### Persad Center Project #1: TGNC Gym

#### Experience and Leadership (25 points possible)

**1. Describe your organization's experience providing services to/in communities that have been marginalized by mainstream systems.**

Persad Center works to improve the lives and well-being of LGBTQ+ people and those impacted by HIV/AIDS through counseling, psychiatry, groups, and social support. Founded in 1972, Persad is the nation's second-oldest licensed counseling center serving that community. Despite the gains for LGBTQ+ and HIV/AIDS-impacted people over the past half-century, community members still experience stigma, shame, trauma, and associated impacts.

Persad focuses its outreach, programming, and services to the populations that are among the most marginalized by the U.S. healthcare system including transgender and gender non-conforming people, lower-income people, and older adults. Persad also offers an array of training and advocacy consultation services that are designed to help organizations—including health and human service agencies, schools, corporations, HR professionals, law enforcement, and public safety officials—be inclusive of and work authentically and successfully with LGBTQ+ individuals and employees.

In addition to listening to the needs of the community on an ongoing basis, Persad provides professional development opportunities to its therapists and staff, such as Transgender Care Therapy Certification Training.

**2. Describe your organization's experience building trust with the communities within which you work and provide at least one specific example to illustrate that experience. Attach at least one letter of support from a community-based organization or community member.**

Persad Center's history of service has expanded over the past 50 years in response to community needs and with direct input from members of the community.

Of the nearly 1,000 individuals who are current clients in the counseling program, roughly 50% are transgender and gender non-conforming (TGNC). One client said, "It's so nice to have a therapist [who is] knowledgeable in transgender issues. I'm so glad this place is here."

**3. Provide a concise statement of your organizational philosophy.**

Persad Center's core values are Accessibility, Dignity, and Representation. It provides professional, culturally affirming counseling and psychiatric services for LGBTQ+ people and people living with HIV/AIDS. Persad offers services to individuals, couples, and families who are

seeking to enjoy healthy and fulfilling lives. In addition to billing insurance providers on behalf of its clients, Persad offers a sliding fee scale for uninsured and under-insured clients to meet the needs of everyone in the community. Persad fulfills its mission through counseling, prevention, outreach, and training services.

Persad was founded at a time when homosexuality was classified as a mental illness in the DSM-II. Persad was created as an affirming counseling center to help LGBTQ+ people cope with systemic social discrimination and to receive appropriate therapeutic counseling services without prejudice about their identity.

**4. List demographic information about your organization’s leadership and staff, as well as the population they serve.**

The number of clients Persad directly serves through its counseling program has tripled since 2019, the last full year prior to the onset of the pandemic when it began providing all counseling services via teletherapy. Persad’s therapists are currently seeing nearly 1,000 unduplicated clients. Over that same period, the number of appointments has doubled to more than 15,000 per year.

Persad Center’s **client demographics** clearly reflect the community it was founded to serve and show the particular importance of strengthening its services to transgender and gender-nonconforming individuals. **Transgender** (or **Trans**) is an umbrella term for anyone whose gender identity that differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. **Gender Non-Conforming** and/or non-binary can be used as is an umbrella term for those whose gender identity falls outside the gender binary of male and female.

**Gender Identity:** 48% Transgender & Gender Non-Conforming (TGNC)  
30% Cisgender Male: male identity is consistent with sex assigned at birth  
22% Cisgender Female: female identity is consistent with sex assigned at birth

**Reason for Visit:** 48% Mental Health  
43% Transgender Care  
3% HIV/AIDS  
3% Substance Abuse  
3% Other/Unassigned

**Annual Income:** 40% \$0-\$12,000  
23% \$12,001-\$25,000  
15% \$25,001-\$40,000  
12% >\$40,000

Persad’s commitment to its community is reflected in the makeup of its board, staff, and therapists.

**Board:** Orientation: 59% LGB; 12% TGNC; 29% Straight  
Gender: 59% male; 41% female

**Staff:** Orientation: 50% LGB; 14% TGNC; 36% Straight  
Gender: 50% male; 50% female

**Therapists:** Orientation: 86% LGB; 7% TGNC; 7% Straight  
Gender: 29% male; 71% female

### Project Details (50 points possible)

**5. Describe what Informal Mental Health Support services your proposed Project will provide, and the intended outcomes you hope to achieve. Include how the Project will meet one or more of the goals listed in RFP Section 2.1.**

#### **TRANSGENDER & GENDER NON-CONFORMING (TGNC) GYM**

There is a strong, positive link between physical health and mental health. To most people, physical health and mental health are two very different things, but that couldn't be farther from the truth. (Source: *The relationship between physical and mental health: A mediation analysis*, Ohrnberger, Fichera, and Sutton, PubMed.gov, 2017).

Transgender individuals are nearly four times as likely as cisgender individuals (people whose gender identity corresponds with their sex assigned at birth) to experience a mental health condition. (Source: *Transgender Health*, Volume 4.1, 2019, "Mental Health Diagnoses Among Transgender Patients in the Clinical Setting," Wanta, Jonathan W. et.al.). Compared to less than 5% of the general U.S. population, 40% of transgender adults have attempted suicide in their lifetime. (Source: *The Report of the U.S. Transgender Survey*, 2015.) Furthermore, transgender individuals are at the highest risk of experiencing mental health issues of all types, including depression and suicidal ideation.

Substance misuse or overuse, which may be used as a coping mechanism or method of self-medication, is a significant concern for members of this community. LGB adults are nearly twice as likely as heterosexual adults to experience a substance use disorder, but transgender individuals are almost four times as likely as cisgender individuals to experience a substance use disorder. (Source: *Journal of Psychiatric Research*, Volume 135, March 2021, pp. 107-118.)

According to Medline Plus, physical health and mental health are intricately related. When an individual has good mental health, their physical health can improve. At the same time, when they have good physical health, their mental health can improve. By connecting physical and mental health and understanding how they influence each other and the importance of optimizing both, one can live a happier, healthier, more fulfilling life.

Persad will design and install a secure gym exclusively for individuals who are trans or gender non-conforming (TGNC). The gym will include the same aerobic and weight bearing equipment that can be found in other small to mid-sized gyms. The big difference here, though, is that

users will no longer be the only TGNC individuals in the room as they are in Allegheny County's many private gyms; they will not be judged by their "differentness" but will be supported in their efforts to improve their bodies on their quest to make those bodies reflect their internal identities. For the first time in the region, users will be able to develop and maintain a positive physical outcome that [1] reinforces their gender expression and [2] allows them to work out in a safe, supportive environment that both contributes to their long term health goals and creates a sense of community and fellowship. The result will reduce the potential for isolation, depression, and suicidal ideation, which are significantly higher among the TGNC population compared with other LGB individuals.

The gym will be open during Persad's business hours, including early evening and Saturday hours, corresponding with the use of the building for counseling. A half-time trainer will manage the gym and be on-site during published hours. Individuals who wish to use the gym will be required to complete, at minimum, a one-hour session with the trainer to establish a basic level of knowledge and safety with the equipment before receiving a key fob to allow access to the secured space. The trainer will be available to coach individuals as they pursue personal goals and will hold regular fitness classes as interest is expressed. Clients will sign a non-disclosure policy to ensure the discretion of those using the gym.

The facility already maintains three lockable ADA-compliant gender-neutral bathrooms within the gym wing, including one with a fully accessible ADA-compliant shower.

#### **Intended outcomes for TGNC Gym**

Outcome 1 - At least 25% of the gym users will demonstrate improvement in their physical and mental well-being as measured by quarterly surveys.

Outcome 2 – At least 25% of gym users who have experienced substance abuse will reduce substance use. Self-reporting will be done each month via survey.

Outcome 3 - 25% of gym users will develop a "buddy system" for the gym so that they have an "accountability buddy" as they begin their journey to wellness. This will be assessed by quarterly survey.

Outcome 4 – 25% of gym users will use the equipment/gym at least three times a week. This information will be gathered via key fob usage.

#### **6. Describe where and to whom you will provide your Project, and why that community needs the proposed Project.**

Persad Center will provide all services described in this proposal at its Lawrenceville base at 5301 Butler Street. The building is a safe space that provides privacy for all those who enter, and ample free parking. The new gym will be in a secured 20' x 30' square foot space within Persad's building that will be dedicated to its use.

In February 2022, a Gallup poll reported that 7.1% of US adults identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. Of those LGBT respondents, 34.6% were lesbian or gay, 56.8% were bisexual, 10.0% were transgender, and 4.3% identified as something else, often gender nonconforming or gender non-binary. LGBTQ+ identity was significantly higher among younger generations

(20.8% of Generation Z and 10.5% of Millennials) than older generations (4.2% of Generation X, 2.6% of Baby Boomers, and 0.8% of those born before 1946).

Substance misuse or overuse, which may be a coping mechanism or method of self-medication, is a significant concern for members of this community. Transgender individuals are almost four times as likely as cisgender individuals to experience a substance use disorder. (Source: *Journal of Psychiatric Research*, Volume 135, March 2021, pp. 107-118.)

Furthermore, transgender individuals are nearly four times more likely than cisgender individuals (people whose gender identity corresponds with their sex assigned at birth) to experience a mental health condition. (Source: *Transgender Health*, Volume 4.1, 2019, "Mental Health Diagnoses Among Transgender Patients in the Clinical Setting," Wanta, Jonathan W. et.al.) Fully 40% of transgender adults have attempted suicide in their lifetime, compared to less than 5% of the general U.S. population. (Source: *The Report of the U.S. Transgender Survey*, 2015.) Furthermore, transgender individuals are at the highest risk of experiencing mental health issues of all types, including depression and suicidal ideation.

The development of the TGNC Gym as one of Persad's services to the community is based, in part, on what is emerging nationally to address the unique needs of trans and gender nonconforming individuals. Such individuals are in the process of breaking new ground physically, by transitioning from one gender to another, or simply do not fit into any gender "box"; in any case, they rarely see themselves reflected in the members or trainers at their community's existing public gyms.

**7. Describe any formal or informal partnerships your Project will require and your plan to develop those. Include a description of how you envision DHS supporting you. (Consider describing how you prefer to communicate with DHS about any system or other barriers your Project encounters, and about any opportunities for system improvements you may identify.)**

Over the years, Persad has formed many formal and informal partnerships with more than 40 like-minded LGBTQ+ friendly organizations. The expectation is that the Outreach Manager will work on engaging (or re-engaging in this post-pandemic time) with those groups and organizations. Persad also envisions the development of a "buddy system" for the TGNC gym as word of mouth gets out about its availability and as the facility's use expands.

**8. Provide a concise project timeline listing when certain activities (e.g., planning, hiring, implementation) and milestones will begin and end.**

The following is a detailed timeline for the Trans Gym Grant

Month 1

Complete layout for gym

Order equipment for gym

Complete insurance application

Plan necessary inspections

Post job description and begin interviews for Outreach Manager

Provide information to each of Persad's current TGNC client base and assess their interest  
Develop marketing plan for reaching other TGNC individuals in Allegheny County

#### Month 2

Hire Outreach Manager; provide Persad-specific training  
Outreach Manager meets with organizations and attends community events to promote gym  
Post job description and begin interviewing for Fitness Trainer  
Website promotes gym opening  
Press Release announces the planned gym opening  
Begin a social media campaign blitz  
PSAs on radio

#### Month 3

Hire Fitness Trainer; provide Persad-specific training  
Fitness Trainer establishes relationships with other inclusive gyms (see question 10) to  
determine best operating practices and most effective marketing strategies for dispersed  
TGNC community  
Outreach Manager continues marketing  
Paint, add mirrors, and plan signage

#### Month 4

Permitting and inspections approved  
Outreach Manager continues marketing  
Prepare for equipment arrival  
Post signage

#### Month 5

Equipment arrival  
Assemble and install equipment; do safety checks  
Outreach Manager continues marketing  
Begin getting sign-ups  
Trainer schedules orientation times with new members of gym

#### Month 6

Gym grand opening & open house  
New members learn how to use each piece of equipment  
New members sign non-disclosure statement to ensure safety and privacy of all members  
New members sign insurance waiver  
Trainer schedules orientation times with new members of gym & class offerings  
Outreach Manager continues marketing

#### Months 7-24

Trainer schedules orientation times with new members of gym & class offerings  
Continue communication with Persad TGNC clients

Continue marketing to other TGNC individuals in Allegheny County  
Solicit regular feedback from users via surveys and listening sessions  
Incorporate changes to operations based on user feedback

**9. Describe your proposed staffing plan, role descriptions and any training requirements. Include whether staff will have or obtain certification as peer specialists, and why.**

Persad Center will expand its existing services to meet the increasing mental health needs of the LGBTQ+ community by adding to its staff roster two new part-time positions: a one-day-a-week Outreach Manager and a half-time Fitness Trainer.

The Outreach Manager will build and expand connections that connect county resources and organizations to the TGNC community. These connections will promote the availability of the gym to individuals, dispersed throughout the region, who will be interested in the new facility.

The Fitness Trainer will oversee the use of the TGNC gym and provide initial training on equipment for all who wish to use the gym as well as individual coaching and fitness classes.

The existing front desk and custodial staff will manage the client traffic and facility care needs. The front desk staff member will be the point person to those using the gym in case of emergency medical needs or other emergencies. That person will be required to complete emergency first aid training. Basic level first aid supplies will be housed within the facility.

<b>Community Involvement and Trust (30 points possible)</b>
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**10. Describe how you included community members in planning and designing your Project.**

As described in the answer to question 4, board, staff, and therapists are highly inclusive of community members, and a number of these individuals have been involved in the conceptualization and writing of this proposal; in addition, Persad has many outside connections to informal networks within the LGBTQ+ community and has received their input in pursuing these projects.

Sara Peterson, of Penn State, and wife Kim Fleming, psychologist, brought the fact that cities across the country have been developing gyms for the TGNC community to the attention of Persad's James Eidel. **Healthline.com** posted a story on its website that "inclusive gyms are on the rise," noting that "gyms can be intimidating, can feel unwelcoming or entirely inaccessible to people who don't meet stereotypical fitness ideals." The article adds that "specialized gyms go beyond offering an inclusive space to exercise—they provide a fun source of community. Not only do these people report feeling happy and strong, but they also cherish meaningful connections with fellow members." (<https://www.healthline.com/health/body/inclusive-gyms-on-the-rise>) The following are several examples of such gyms.

**Nonnormative Body Club** is a **Philadelphia**-based program with a goal to "create accessible fitness spaces for those whose bodies and identities rebel against normative definitions of

beauty and health. Nonnormative Body Club offers personal training, group fitness, and trans-wellness workshops.”

**Liberation Barbell Club**, based in **Austin, TX**, is a strength community for all people whose “aim is to create a safe and healthy place for athletes, hobbyists, and beginners to start or continue their strength journey. We celebrate success and support each other through difficulty and failure. We embrace difference and we challenge the status quo. We believe that true strength begins within. The foundation of our gym and community is dignity, best expressed by Donna Hick’s work at Harvard University and her ‘Ten Elements of Dignity.’ These elements are the basis of our code of conduct as well as the framework for how we treat our members, our staff, and each other.”

**Han Training | Queer/Trans/BIPOC/Fat-Liberated Fitness** based in **Chicago**, says on their website, “We could’ve just opened a regular gym, but where’s the fun in that? At Han Training, we believe that all bodies and all people deserve to find joy, resilience, and healing in movement and rediscover a lasting relationship with their bodies that focuses on strength, connection, and intention. We adamantly believe in serving our communities by upholding queer/trans/gender-affirming, fat liberated, physically/financially accessible, trauma-informed, judgement-free, and informative coaching to help our members reach their goals.”

**OutBox** in **Brooklyn, NY**, is a boxing and fitness club that centers on queer and trans clients. Founder Max Adler says, “I wanted to create a space where there’s no gender barriers, where queer and trans people can come and be comfortable.” A participant adds, “Working out is an inherently vulnerable experience. There’s a higher level of understanding of the heightened relationship queer and trans people have with their bodies. Some participants may experience body image concerns or dysmorphia that queer-led classes are especially sensitive to.”

**EVERYBODY** is a queer and trans owned gym founded in **Glassell Park, CA** that is “devoted to providing a brave and supportive environment for all bodies to move, strengthen, and heal. It’s about body positivity whatever your body is and looks like and needs and wants at that time. There’s no defining what’s right for your fitness-wise because of your presumed gender or appearance.”

**11. Describe how you will include community members in the implementation/staffing/assessment of your Project.**

The Outreach Manager and Fitness Trainer will meet the requirements of Persad's job and staffing guidelines and receive sensitivity and competency training.

**12. Explain why you are the appropriate provider of this Project, specifically addressing why your community will trust you to provide this Project.**

Persad Center has a 50-year history of service that has been developed in response to community needs and with ongoing input from the community. All clients are invited to respond to a survey at least once a year: 99% reported that their therapist always treats them with dignity and respect and 93% would recommend Persad to someone who needs help.



The following is a sampling of Persad’s successful programming in the community.

**1972:** Persad Center is founded by Randal Forrester and James Huggins; it is the nation’s second licensed counseling center specifically created to serve the LGBTQ+ community, with a commitment to making services available to economically challenged clients.

**1974:** The classification of homosexuality as a mental illness is removed from DSM-II. Persad Center co-founder James Huggins, PhD, is a key advocate in the effort.

**1982:** The Centers for Disease Control defines AIDS. Persad Center created the first AIDS support program in the tri-state area.

**1987:** Persad Center begins offering training services to promote LGBTQ+ competence for human service professionals.

**2000:** Persad Center begins a domestic violence treatment program for same-sex couples.

**2003:** Persad Center obtains a license from the PA Department of Health, Division of Drug and Alcohol Program Licensing, to offer substance abuse treatment services.

**2008:** Creating a safe space for LGBTQ+ youth, Persad Center opens an afterschool program in the Gay and Lesbian Community Center.

**2010:** Persad Center launches the Community Safe Zone program to combat LGBTQ+ hate crimes and discrimination in the counties of Southwestern Pennsylvania.

**2011:** Persad Center became the regional affiliate of the national SAGE (Services and Advocacy for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Elders) organization. A senior client commented:

**2013:** Persad Center hosts a regional *Safe Schools Summit* to address the issue of bullying of LGBTQ+ youth.

**2015:** Expanding services to the community, Persad Center moves into a brand-new facility at 5301 Butler Street in Lawrenceville.

**2020:** Forced to close its doors to in-person therapy and programs by the pandemic, Persad Center quickly pivots the delivery method of its basic services, by making the move to teletherapy.

### **Data Collection and Reporting (10 points possible)**

#### **13. Describe what data you currently collect on your programs.**

Persad uses a Client Management System that was fully implemented in 2022. The software offers functionality for case management, client tracking, and treatment planning. The database includes information relative to age, income, employment status, gender identity, and sexual orientation.

#### **14. Describe how you will know if your Project is effective in achieving its goals and what data you will collect to track its effectiveness.**

By providing users who have been trained on the equipment with key fob access to the gym, Persad will be able to track **frequency** of their visits as well as develop a **program profile** of each user. This will allow Persad to track age, gender identification, frequency of use, and client status; there will also be ongoing programming inquiries developed by the outreach manager and fitness trainer to establish changing needs and respond to program requests.

Persad will assess effectiveness in achieving its goals based on [1] the number of individuals who sign up to use the gym, [2] the number of sessions attended by each participant every month, responses to user surveys and group listening sessions, [3] the rate of attracting new participants, growth in number of total participants, and [4] the growth in number of user-sessions each month. In addition, [5] Persad will develop tools in conjunction with the therapeutic staff to determine the impact of gym use by TGNC individuals on their mental health and physical health outcomes.

In the first two years, there will be no charge for use of the gym; in subsequent years, Persad may implement a sliding-scale fee for participants, taking care not to exclude individuals for whom a charge would prohibit participation.

Our year one numbers will be exponentially lower than year 2. The first six months of the project is the buildout, training and purchasing of equipment. The equipment we need to order has almost a five to six month waiting period due to supply chain issues. Year two we believe that the numbers will be between 275 and 400 members.

**Budget (10 points possible)**

**15. Provide a detailed line-item budget that reflects a realistic estimate of the costs associated with planning, implementing, and sustaining the Project. Please remember that Project staff must earn no less than \$15/hour and you may include language assistance services costs in the budget.**

<b>SUPPORT GROUPS</b>	<b>Year 1</b>	<b>Year 2</b>	<b>Total</b>
Salaries + benefits			
Outreach Manager	12,000	12,000	24,000
Fitness Trainer	29,250	29,250	58,500
Custodial Manager	8,000	8,000	16,000
Administrative Support	6,300	6,300	12,600
<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>55,550</b>	<b>55,500</b>	<b>111,100</b>
<b>Other Expenses</b>			
Equipment & Installation	68,250	0	68,250
Marketing & Materials	4,275	4,275	8,550
Signage	5,700	0	5,700
Build Out Contingency	13,600	0	13,660
Key Fob/Security Access	15,000	0	15,000
Cleaning Supplies, etc.	2,500	2,500	5,000
<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>109,325</b>	<b>6,775</b>	<b>116,100</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>164,875</b>	<b>62,275</b>	<b>227,150</b>

**16. Provide a budget narrative that clearly explains and justifies all line items in the proposed budget.**

The Outreach Manager’s salary was based on research that showed that \$75,000 is the average for this type of position employed on a full-time basis. Employer’s taxes and benefits represent an additional \$15,000, totaling \$90,000. This position will spend one day per week on outreach for the TGNC Gym. The prorated portion of this position is thus \$18,000/year.

The Fitness Trainer is a half-time position with no benefits.

Custodial Manager’s salary is based upon the amount of time needed to keep the bathrooms, gym, and floors clean and clear of debris. The gym needs to be gone through and cleaned at least 1 time every two hours based upon the amount of people using the gym.

Administrative support salary is based upon paperwork, surveys, check in and check out procedures that will need to be completed by each member of the gym. This is a rolling process throughout the entire year.

Equipment and Installation includes the following:

Precor Icarian 5 stack	16,000
Chest Equipment	10,000
Leg Equipment	10,000
Treadmills (2)	4,500
Elliptical Trainer (2)	4,000
Weights/Hex plates	4,500
Benches (flat, adjustable)	4,440
Mirrors	4,800
Floor Mats	1,750
Acoustic Tiles	1,000
Water Fountain	1,000
Sound System	1,260
Installation/Setup	<u>5,000</u>
	\$68,250

Marketing includes print pieces for posting and distribution as well as advertisements in targeted newspapers and other periodicals.

Persad will purchase and install permanent interior and exterior signage for the gym.

The Build Out Contingency will cover construction-related costs that may be necessary, e.g., flooring that may need additional reinforcement, or additional lighting and electrical needs.

Key fob access and security will be a year one only purchase. The security system, key fobs and access will be installed prior to opening of the gym.

The gym can be an environment for harmful germs and viruses, specifically on surfaces and exercise equipment. Preventing the spread of viruses and germs needs to be a top priority. We will purchase highly affective cleaning products and equipment to keep everyone safe and everything cleaned in the best possible way.

Here is a list of gym cleaning equipment we will purchase:

1. High filtration vacuum cleaner
2. Floor Scrubber
3. Floor Cleaner and degreaser
4. Gym spray bottle with high-strength bacterial cleaner
5. Microfiber cloths
6. Pre-saturated gym disinfectant wipes
7. Glass cleaners, sponges, and magic eraser
8. Brooms, buckets, and mops
9. Garbage cans and trash bag liners



Allegheny County Department of Human Services

# RFP Response Form

## RFP for Community-Led and Community-Operated Informal Mental Health Supports

### Persad Center Project #2: Support Groups

<b>Experience and Leadership (25 points possible)</b>
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**1. Describe your organization's experience providing services to/in communities that have been marginalized by mainstream systems.**

Persad Center works to improve the lives and well-being of LGBTQ+ people and those impacted by HIV/AIDS through counseling, psychiatry, groups, and social support. Founded in 1972, Persad is the nation's second-oldest licensed counseling center serving that community. Despite the gains for LGBTQ+ and HIV/AIDS-impacted people over the past half-century, community members still experience stigma, shame, trauma, and associated impacts.

Persad focuses its outreach, programming, and services to the populations that are among the most marginalized by the U.S. healthcare system including transgender and gender non-conforming people, lower-income people, and older adults. Persad also offers an array of training and advocacy consultation services that are designed to help organizations—including health and human service agencies, schools, corporations, HR professionals, law enforcement, and public safety officials—be inclusive of and work authentically and successfully with LGBTQ+ individuals and employees.

In addition to listening to the needs of the community on an ongoing basis, Persad provides professional development opportunities to its therapists and staff, such as Transgender Care Therapy Certification Training.

**2. Describe your organization's experience building trust with the communities within which you work and provide at least one specific example to illustrate that experience. Attach at least one letter of support from a community-based organization or community member.**

Persad Center's history of service has expanded over the past 50 years in response to community needs and with direct input from members of the community.

For the past 11 years, for instance, Persad Center has been the regional affiliate of the national SAGE (Services and Advocacy for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Elders) organization. A senior client commented: "We were a group of older LGBTQ+ adults who wanted a comfortable social group without going to bars and without great expense for participants. My husband and I found this group to be supportive of us by broadening our contacts in the community and finding new friendships among the LGBTQ+ older community."

### 3. Provide a concise statement of your organizational philosophy.

Persad Center's core values are Accessibility, Dignity, and Representation. It provides professional, culturally affirming counseling and psychiatric services for LGBTQ+ people and people living with HIV/AIDS. Persad offers services to individuals, couples, and families who are seeking to enjoy healthy and fulfilling lives. In addition to billing insurance providers on behalf of its clients, Persad offers a sliding fee scale for uninsured and under-insured clients to meet the needs of everyone in the community. Persad fulfills its mission through counseling, prevention, outreach, and training services.

Persad was founded at a time when homosexuality was classified as a mental illness in the DSM-II. Persad was created as an affirming counseling center to help LGBTQ+ people cope with systemic social discrimination and to receive appropriate therapeutic counseling services without prejudice about their identity.

### 4. List demographic information about your organization's leadership and staff, as well as the population they serve.

The number of clients Persad directly serves through its counseling program has tripled since 2019, the last full year prior to the onset of the pandemic when it began providing all counseling services via teletherapy. Persad's therapists are currently seeing nearly 1,000 unduplicated clients. Over that same period, the number of appointments has doubled to more than 15,000 per year.

Persad Center's client demographics clearly reflect the community it was founded to serve and show the particular importance of strengthening its services to transgender and gender-nonconforming individuals. **Transgender** (or **Trans**) is an umbrella term for anyone whose gender identity that differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. **Gender Non-Conforming** and/or non-binary can be used as is an umbrella term for those whose gender identity falls outside the gender binary of male and female.

**Gender Identity:** 48% Transgender & Gender Non-Conforming (TGNC)  
30% Cisgender Male: male identity is consistent with sex assigned at birth  
22% Cisgender Female: female identity is consistent with sex assigned at birth

**Reason for Visit:** 48% Mental Health  
43% Transgender Care  
3% HIV/AIDS  
3% Substance Abuse  
3% Other/Unassigned

**Annual Income:** 40% \$0-\$12,000  
23% \$12,001-\$25,000  
15% \$25,001-\$40,000  
12% >\$40,000

Persad’s commitment to its community is reflected in the makeup of its board, staff, and therapists.

**Board:** Orientation: 59% LGB; 12% TGNC; 29% Straight  
Gender: 59% male; 41% female

**Staff:** Orientation: 50% LGB; 14% TGNC; 36% Straight  
Gender: 50% male; 50% female

**Therapists:** Orientation: 86% LBG; 7% TGNC; 7% Straight  
Gender: 29% male; 71% female

### Project Details (50 points possible)

**5. Describe what Informal Mental Health Support services your proposed Project will provide, and the intended outcomes you hope to achieve. Include how the Project will meet one or more of the goals listed in RFP Section 2.1.**

#### **TARGETED SUPPORT GROUPS**

Persad Center recognizes the value it can provide as a safe space where individuals can learn from their peers. Support Groups help reduce social isolation and increase social interaction. They bring together people who are going through—or have gone through—similar experiences. While a person’s family and friends may not understand the impact of their challenges, targeted support groups provide a way for them to receive emotional support from peers, guided by a skilled facilitator.

This is especially relevant in the current situation where [1] the number of people wanting to begin individual therapy has sharply increased, while at the same time [2] the challenges of moving each person’s case through bureaucratic insurance hurdles have resulted in a long wait list. This combination has led to a significant increase in the number of therapists Persad has engaged in the past two years, from 10 to 17.

With the support of two new staff positions—a full-time **Case Manager/Group Facilitator** and a 4-day per week **Outreach Manager**—Persad will form and/or expand five Informal support groups. All individuals on Persad’s waitlist will be invited to join the group/s or their choice, and they may continue if they wish, even after they are placed with an individual therapist. No fee will be charged to participants and no insurance reimbursements will be sought.

#### **Recovery Support Group:**

According to the National Institute of Health (NIH), human beings naturally congregate in groups. The NIH describes a support group as the “giving and receiving nonprofessional, nonclinical assistance from individuals with similar conditions or circumstances” to achieve long-term recovery. Although the Case Manager will act as a facilitator, the groups are often co-

conducted by recovering addicts themselves as they help each other navigate through sober living; members help each other stay clean and sober. The group will meet weekly for 90-minutes at the outset.

**Art-Making Support Group:**

Studies indicate that making art can be used as an effective complement to traditional mental health treatment. The aim is to manage behaviors, process feelings, reduce stress and anxiety, and increase self-esteem. This support group will provide an option for anyone who feels overwhelmed or pressured by the hectic world. Making art offers an individual a chance to slow down and explore issues they may be having. Supplies will be provided by Persad. The Art-Making Support Group will meet weekly for 90 minutes at the outset.

**People Living with HIV Support Group:**

This group will enable participants to share experiences, encourage safe disclosure, reduce stigma and discrimination, improve self-esteem, enhance coping skills and psychosocial functioning, and support medication adherence and improved retention in HIV care. The group facilitator will be able to share resources in areas that include enrolling in insurance programs; applying for housing and utilities assistance; connecting with behavioral health support; and identifying other community services. The group will meet weekly for 90-minutes at the outset.

**Adult (18+) Transgender & Gender Non-Conforming (TGNC) Support Group:**

This support group will offer people a chance to connect and discuss similar life experiences and challenges: it can be extremely helpful to talk with people who understand those parts of a person's life without needing an explanation. They can serve as resources in a time of crisis or just a sympathetic ear. Topics will include coping with and managing gender dysphoria (the distressed state arising from a conflict between a person's gender identity and their sex assigned at birth), coming out, self-esteem, dating and relating, and medical options for transition. Other discussion topics include living authentically, transitioning in the workplace, violence against TGNC people, religion and spirituality, and intersectionality of TGNC and People of Color. The group will meet weekly for 90-minutes at the outset.

**Seniors (55+) Support Group:**

About 20% of all older adults experience a mental illness or substance use disorder as they age. This puts LGBTQ+ seniors at an even higher risk of experiencing a mental health condition. Persad Center has been facilitating a support group for LGBTQ+ seniors since 2008. Fifty unique individuals actively participate in a weekly two-hour in-person "Coffee and Conversation" gathering at Persad, and a weekly one-hour Zoom gathering on weekday evenings. On average, each gathering attracts 15-20 people; some participate regularly while others do so more sporadically. Special guests and speakers are invited monthly to address issues of particular interest. Persad Center has also begun offering a monthly event where lunch is provided and has organized "pay as you go" outings to cultural organizations and sporting events. Persad's part-time (10 hours/week) Senior Outreach & Advocacy Manager coordinates a monthly programming meeting for interested older adults to provide direct input into the vetting and selection of future events and speakers. With the additional capacity afforded by an Outreach



Coordinator, Persad will be able to reach out more effectively to the 400+ inactive subscribers to Persad's weekly Senior newsletter, as well as to new community partners and organizations serving the older population, such as senior living facilities, the Area Agency on Aging, and faith-based organizations.

**6. Describe where and to whom you will provide your Project, and why that community needs the proposed Project.**

Persad Center will offer all services described in this proposal at its Lawrenceville base at 5301 Butler Street. The building is a safe space that provides privacy for those who enter, and ample free parking. Support groups will take place in a 29'x 43' room at Persad.

A February 2022 Gallup poll reported that 7.1% of US adults identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. Of those LGBT respondents, 34.6% were lesbian or gay, 56.8% were bisexual, 10.0% were transgender, and 4.3% identified as something else. LGBTQ+ identity was significantly higher among younger generations (20.8% of Generation Z and 10.5% of Millennials) than older generations (4.2% of Generation X, 2.6% of Baby Boomers, and 0.8% of those born before 1946).

According to the World Health Organization, mental disorders affect 1 in 4 people around the world. However, LGBTQ+ individuals are more than twice as likely as heterosexual individuals to have a mental health disorder in their lifetime. They are 2.5 times more likely to experience depression, anxiety, and substance misuse compared with heterosexual individuals. (Source: Psychiatry.org, "Diversity & Health Equity Education: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer/Questioning.")

Substance misuse or overuse, which may be used as a coping mechanism or a method of self-medication, is of significant concern for members of this community. LGB adults are nearly twice as likely as heterosexual adults to experience a substance use disorder. And transgender individuals are almost four times as likely than cisgender individuals to experience a substance use disorder. (Source: *Journal of Psychiatric Research*, Volume 135, March 2021, pp. 107-118.) About 20% of all older adults experience a mental illness or substance use disorder as they age. This puts LGBTQ+ seniors at an even higher risk of experiencing a mental health condition.

**7. Describe any formal or informal partnerships your Project will require and your plan to develop those. Include a description of how you envision DHS supporting you.**

Over the years, Persad has formed many formal and informal partnerships with over 40 like-minded LGBTQ+ friendly organizations. The new Outreach Manager will work on engaging (or re-engaging in this post-pandemic time) with those groups and organizations.

For instance, the current senior programming is committed to combating isolation among LGBTQ+ elders by providing safe and accessible opportunities for social, educational, and recreational activities. The August 4 speaker was Jim Pieffer, President and CEO of Presbyterian SeniorCare Network, a strong ally of the LGBTQ+ older adult community, who talked about the Oakland Pride Senior Housing Project. Other upcoming events include speakers from

Southwestern Pennsylvania Partnership for Aging's Age-Friendly Greater Pittsburgh, and engagement with the National Institute of Aging's Senior Health program on memory loss, Alzheimer's, dementia, and cognitive decline. By hiring an Outreach Manager, Persad will be able to further expand not only senior resources for the LGBTQ+ community but also resources relevant for people living with HIV, transgender and gender non-conforming individuals, and LGBTQ+ individuals in recovery from alcohol and drug abuse, among other relevant partners.

**8. Provide a concise project timeline listing when certain activities (e.g., planning, hiring, implementation) and milestones will begin and end.**

The following is a detailed timeline for the Support Groups

Month 1

Post job description and begin interviews for Case Manager/Group Facilitator  
Post job description and begin interviews for Outreach Manager  
Develop marketing plan  
Develop pre- and post-surveys  
Develop progress monitoring tools for weekly participants

Month 2

Hire Case Manager/Group Facilitator; provide Persad-specific training  
Hire Outreach Manager; provide Persad-specific training  
Website promotion of new support groups including date and time  
Press Release announcing the ongoing and new support groups  
Begin a general social media campaign blitz

Month 3

Outreach Manager connects with broad-based County resources to attract participants  
Continue general marketing  
Members of each group to do first pre survey on date of first meeting  
Weekly progress monitoring surveys to be completed

Month 4

Launch support groups  
Continue marketing  
Members of each group to do first month post survey  
Weekly progress monitoring surveys to be completed

Month 5

Continue marketing  
Members of each group to do second month post survey  
Weekly progress monitoring surveys to be completed

Month 6

Make changes that may be needed based on input from participants or those who wish to participate, such as [1] addition of virtual groups to better engage individuals with transportation challenges or those who live a distance away from Persad in rural Allegheny County, and [2] changes or adjustments in meeting times and/or duration.

**9. Describe your proposed staffing plan, role descriptions and any training requirements. Include whether staff will have or obtain certification as peer specialists, and why.**

Persad Center will expand its existing services to meet the increasing mental health needs of the LGBTQ+ community by adding to its staff roster two new positions: a full-time Case Manager, who is experienced in group facilitation, and a part-time Outreach Manager. These two staff positions will enable Persad to work to reduce stigma and smooth the way to both informal and formal mental health supports for people who may not know about or feel comfortable accessing them. All individuals who are currently (and in the future) on the waitlist prior to being placed with a therapist will be invited to participate in a group of their choosing.

The Case Manager will plan curriculum, facilitate the support groups, and mentor lay leaders who emerge. The Outreach Manager will build and expand connections that connect county resources and organizations to the LGBTQ+ community. These connections will promote the availability of the support groups to individuals, dispersed throughout the region, who will be interested in the new offerings.

The existing front desk and custodial staff will manage the client traffic and facility care needs. The front desk staff member will be the point person in case of emergency medical needs or other emergencies. That person will be required to complete emergency first aid training. Basic level first aid supplies will be housed within the facility.

**Community Involvement and Trust (30 points possible)**

**10. Describe how you included community members in planning and designing your Project.**

As described in the answer to question 4, board, staff, and therapists are highly inclusive of community members, and a number of these individuals have been involved in the conceptualization and writing of this proposal; in addition, Persad has many outside connections to informal networks within the LGBTQ+ community and has received their input in developing this project.

**11. Describe how you will include community members in the implementation/staffing/assessment of your Project.**

The Case Manager/Group Facilitator and Outreach Manager will meet the requirements of Persad's jobs and staffing guidelines and receive sensitivity and competency training.

As Allegheny County moves away from the pandemic restrictions of the past 2½ years,

Persad can offer its support groups in person or virtually, patterned after current group support to LGBTQ+ seniors, but with more intentional outreach. While it doesn't fully address the isolation that people may have been experiencing, meeting virtually invites and smooths the way for participation by individuals for whom transportation in general is an issue, or who live in more rural areas of Allegheny County.

Whether Persad's groups will [1] meet all in person, [2] alternate between meeting in-person and meeting remotely via Zoom, or [3] hold two groups each week (one via Zoom and one in person), will be determined after the in-person groups have been meeting for four to six months. Unfortunately, hybrid models (including in-person and virtual participants) do not work well for groups that depend on clarity of interaction because of the limitations of the technology.

The length of time that each group meets may be adjusted with input from participants and members of the wider community after each group has been meeting for four to six months.

For some groups, like Art Making, the Case Manager will reach out to trained art therapists to assist in planning and/or to help lead these lessons. Other groups may eventually become more peer-led by ambassadors from the community in addition to the group facilitator.

**12. Explain why you are the appropriate provider of this Project, specifically addressing why your community will trust you to provide this Project. (Consider describing the length of time in the community and years in operation, prior successful programs, the community's involvement in current programs, other examples of leadership in your community or other information you think would be helpful.)**

Persad Center has a 50-year history of service that has been developed in response to community needs and with ongoing input from the community. All clients are invited to respond to a survey at least once a year: 99% reported that their therapist always treats them with dignity and respect and 93% would recommend Persad to someone who needs help.

The following is a sampling of Persad's successful programming in the community.

**1972:** Persad Center is founded by Randal Forrester and James Huggins; it is the nation's second licensed counseling center specifically created to serve the LGBTQ+ community, with a commitment to making services available to economically challenged clients.

**1974:** The classification of homosexuality as a mental illness is removed from DSM-II. Persad Center co-founder James Huggins, PhD, is a key advocate in the effort.

**1982:** The Centers for Disease Control defines AIDS. Persad Center created the first AIDS support program in the tri-state area.

**1987:** Persad Center begins offering training services to promote LGBTQ+ competence for human service professionals.

**2000:** Persad Center begins a domestic violence treatment program for same-sex couples.

**2003:** Persad Center obtains a license from the PA Department of Health, Division of Drug and Alcohol Program Licensing, to offer substance abuse treatment services.

**2008:** Creating a safe space for LGBTQ+ youth, Persad Center opens an afterschool program in the Gay and Lesbian Community Center.

**2010:** Persad Center launches the Community Safe Zone program to combat LGBTQ+ hate crimes and discrimination in the counties of Southwestern Pennsylvania.

**2011:** Persad Center became the regional affiliate of the national SAGE (Services and Advocacy for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Elders) organization. A senior client commented:

**2013:** Persad Center hosts a regional *Safe Schools Summit* to address the issue of bullying of LGBTQ+ youth.

**2015:** Expanding services to the community, Persad Center moves into a brand-new facility at 5301 Butler Street in Lawrenceville.

**2020:** Forced to close its doors to in-person therapy and programs by the pandemic, Persad Center quickly pivots the delivery method of its basic services, by making the move to teletherapy.

### Data Collection and Reporting (10 points possible)

#### **13. Describe what data you currently collect on your programs.**

Persad uses a Client Management System that was fully implemented in 2022. The software offers functionality for case management, client tracking, and treatment planning. The database also includes information relative to age, income, employment status, gender identity, and sexual orientation.

#### **14. Describe how you will know if your Project is effective in achieving its goals and what data you will collect to track its effectiveness.**

The most common method of measuring the effectiveness of these groups is through **Pre/Post Surveys**. This will give a beginning snapshot and a progress report monthly. Surveying group members can give useful information about what participants are thinking and what they want to get out of the group. This also provides a better opportunity to see individual growth than a “yes/no” option.

Persad will assess effectiveness in achieving its goals based on [1] weekly sign-in sheets that will enable the Group Facilitator to assess the number of unique individuals participating and the duration of each individual’s participation; [2] comparison of the number of participants in each type of support group (and the addition of sections of a particular group or the addition of a new group type based on evidence of demand); [3] response from participants to pre/post surveys about the relevance of each type of support group and whether the groups are meeting individual needs; and [4] the perceived impact on Persad’s waitlist by making individuals feel more comfortable and supported while they are waiting to be assigned to a therapist, assessed by surveys and group discussions.

Year one numbers will be lower than year 2 due to the implementation months of 1-3. Our support groups should have a maximum attendee set for 25 participants and 1 facilitator. With

year 1 having a total of 125 participants. We are hoping the demand for our groups leads to having three of each group in year 2, making the numbers triple what year 1 was.

**Budget (10 points possible)**

**15. Provide a detailed line-item budget that reflects a realistic estimate of the costs associated with planning, implementing, and sustaining the Project. Please remember that Project staff must earn no less than \$15/hour and you may include language assistance services costs in the budget.**

<b>SUPPORT GROUPS</b>	<b>Year 1</b>	<b>Year 2</b>	<b>Total</b>
Salaries + benefits			
Case Manager/Group Facilitator	75,000	75,000	150,000
Outreach Manager	72,000	72,000	144,000
Custodial Manager	12,000	12,000	24,000
Administrative Support	12,700	12,700	25,400
<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>171,700</b>	<b>171,700</b>	<b>343,400</b>
<b>Other Expenses</b>			
Marketing	4,275	4,275	8,550
<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>4,275</b>	<b>4,275</b>	<b>8,550</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>175,975</b>	<b>175,975</b>	<b>351,950</b>

**16. Provide a budget narrative that clearly explains and justifies all line items in the proposed budget.**

The Case Manager/Group Facilitator’s salary was based on research that showed that \$62,500 is the average for this type of position employed on a full-time basis. Employer’s taxes and benefits represent an additional \$12,500, totaling \$75,000.

The Outreach Manager’s salary was based on research that showed that \$75,000 is the average for this type of position employed on a full-time basis. Employer’s taxes and benefits represent an additional \$15,000, totaling \$90,000. This position will spend four days per week on outreach for the Support Groups. The prorated portion of this position is thus \$72,000/year.

Marketing includes print pieces for posting and distribution as well as advertisements in targeted newspapers and other periodicals.

July 31, 2022

Allegheny County Dept. of Human Services  
One Smithfield Street  
Pittsburgh PA 15222

To Whom It May Concern:

On behalf of Presbyterian SeniorCare Network, I am writing to provide support to Persad Center and their grant submission to the Allegheny County Department of Human Services for Community-Led and Community Operated Informal Mental Health Supports.

For the past 50 years, Pittsburgh is proud to be the home to Persad Center, the second largest LGBTQ+ mental health agency in the U.S. Historically, the LGBTQ+ community has faced mental health and substance use problems at higher rates than their non-LGBTQ+ peers. The LGBTQ+ community has reported that they were more likely to seek out mental health care during the pandemic than non-LGBT people, including via telemedicine. While Telemedicine now allows Persad and its specialized services to be more accessible to everyone, the increase in need has led to a shortage of mental health professionals, and thus greater wait times for those seeking mental health services in Allegheny County.

Due to the rising mental health crisis across the LGBTQ+ population in the region, I respectfully ask that you consider this proposal from Persad to provide critical Informal Mental Health Supports for those in the community who so urgently need their services.

Sincerely,



James B. Pieffer  
President & CEO



Pittsburgh Black Pride  
PO Box 7514  
Pittsburgh, PA 15213  
[pittsburghblackpride@gmail.com](mailto:pittsburghblackpride@gmail.com)  
[www.pghblackpride.org](http://www.pghblackpride.org)

July 31, 2022

Allegheny County Dept. of Human Services  
One Smithfield Street  
Pittsburgh PA 15222

To Whom It May Concern:

On behalf of Pittsburgh Black Pride, I am writing to provide support to Persad Center and their grant submission to the Allegheny County Department of Human Services for Community-Led and Community Operated Informal Mental Health Supports. Historically, the LGBTQ+ community, especially LGBTQ+ people of color, have faced mental health and substance use problems at higher rates than their non-LGBTQ+ peers. Additionally, LGBTQ+ individuals and communities have faced numerous social barriers, including heterosexism and transphobia, while attempting to access mental health care. Recent reports show overall increases in mental health help-seeking, with LGBTQ+ community members being more likely to seek out mental health care during the COVID-19 pandemic than non-LGBT people. Additionally, telemedicine now allows greater access to mental health services for LGBTQ+ people. However, the increase in mental health care utilization has led to a shortage of mental health professionals, and thus greater wait times for those seeking mental health services in Allegheny County. Additionally, ongoing barriers, like heterosexism and transphobia, continue to prevent LGBTQ+ people from accessing the affirming, effective mental health care services that they deserve. Therefore, additional mechanisms are required to address the growing needs for mental health care services for LGBT+ community members in non-traditional settings.

Given the rising mental health needs among LGBTQ+ people in our region, I write this letter in support of the proposals from Persad to provide critical non-traditional mental health supports via the support groups and a gym for individuals with trans and non-binary identities. These two mechanisms are evidence-based strategies proven to increase mental wellness for individuals engaged with them. As the second largest LGBTQ+ mental health agency in the U.S., Persad has been providing health and social services to the LGBTQ+ community of Pittsburgh for 50 years. This vast wealth of experience providing services to the community will help to ensure that the structure and processes of the gym and support groups are grounded in the realities of the community they are intended to serve and structured to provide culturally congruent and respectful services to LGBTQ+ people.

I believe that the mechanisms proposed by Persad to meet the increasing mental health care needs of the LGBTQ+ community in the Pittsburgh region are worthwhile. These non-traditional means to improve mental health outcomes will provide new and exciting ways to meet the needs of our community. I hope that you will fund these efforts. I thank you for your consideration of my letter.

Sincerely,

Andre L. Brown, PhD, MPH  
President