

Dear School Administrator:

My name is Marc Sophos and I'm the executive director of Media for the Public Good / OutCasting Media, a Westchester-based nonprofit that produces public radio's only nationally distributed LGBTQ youth programs. I'm writing to offer your students a unique opportunity to participate.

No money is involved and this is not a business proposition. Our funding comes from individual charitable donations and grants from foundations that support our mission; neither youth participants nor schools pay any fees.

We are contacting you simply to ask for your help in finding students to join our program, which advances public understanding of LGBTQ issues through in-depth public radio programming. Through their participation, our youth participants gain significant and sometimes life changing experience.

Students from many lower Hudson valley schools have participated during the 10 years we've been doing this work (see list below), and we hope that students from your school will want to join.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- We're **seeking student participants** – straight allies and LGBTQ students, closeted or out. They may be interested because they're LGBTQ or because they're interested in journalism, audio production, or related fields, even if they don't identify as LGBTQ themselves.
- Students can
 - **get unparalleled, resume-building experience** in the creation of these programs. Working substantively on nationally distributed public radio programs is an experience very rarely available to young people.
 - **learn and practice** research, writing and speaking for broadcast, journalism, interviewing, law and public policy, audio production, and more.
 - **explore LGBTQ issues** in great depth with noted experts.
 - **become more comfortable in their own identities.** They can talk about issues in their lives that they may not be able to talk about anywhere else.

- Participation is potentially influential in helping students gain **admission to college**. Some have called it **the most important experience of their high school years**.
- LGBTQ youth are at greatly increased risk of homelessness and suicide. A school administrator in our area noted that **when school personnel see at-risk students, they need to find programs that can help**. OutCasting empowers youth to embrace their LGBTQ identities and join the movement for equality, helping them build confidence and self esteem. In this way, OutCasting can be an **important resource for schools**.
- Our programs reach listeners on **200 public radio stations and on all major podcast platforms**. The programs are also available on our website, <https://mfpg.org>. Our content has been selected for permanent archiving in the **Library of Congress and the American Archive of Public Broadcasting**, and it bolsters even further our participants' self esteem to know that their work is being preserved and made available to researchers and others as part of the historical record of the United States.

- **Why are we reaching out to you?** Here's what we're asking:

- Please **share this email with personnel** in your school who may have contact with students who may be interested – guidance counselors, teachers, librarians, club advisors, other administrators, etc.

Please let me know if there are people in your school with whom I should follow up personally.

Info sheet: <https://mfpg.org/schools/02a-info-sheet-for-educators.pdf>

More information for educators: <https://mfpg.org/schools>

- Please **share the information in red text below with students** who may be interested.

Students can contact us through the application form at <https://mfpg.org/apply>

- **Video:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o6ITcGhJRU>

END OF EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

MORE INFO

OutCasting, now in its 11th year, offers students the opportunity to explore LGBTQ issues not only within our group but also with eminent experts and others who have in-depth knowledge of these issues or compelling stories to tell. As our student participants do this, they are able to talk about issues in their lives that they may not be comfortable talking about elsewhere, and this helps them become more comfortable in their LGBTQ identities and find a social context for their lives.

LGBTQ+ students, closeted or out, are welcome, as are straight allies.

STUDENT VOICES: Being part of this public radio program – not as interns assisting in an adult-run environment but actually producing the shows themselves with professional training and supervision – makes **our young participants stand out in the competitive college application process**. It also gives them transferable skills and confidence that will serve them throughout their lives.

Some have called OutCasting the most important experience of their high school years. Some have called it life changing.

- *"OutCasting has made me stand out in my studies but also in my professional life. Whenever I hand somebody a resume, I always get a comment about OutCasting. I think they're so moved by it because not only is this topic relevant and important, but OutCasting provides you with so much practical experience for so many different avenues that no matter what your passions are, you'll be able to apply what you've learned."*
- *"In the past, my passion for LGBT rights was displayed as anger towards oppressors and anti-LGBT activists. It made me furious that my friends and family were being hurt by ignorance and hatred. I was angry at other people for saying and doing these hurtful things, but I was also angry at myself for not doing more to support my loved ones."*

"OutCasting has provided me with a fun and creative outlet to channel my anger into positivity and education that everyone can use."

"Knowing that I'm making a difference through this show is one of the most satisfying feelings in the world, and the people I have become friends with during this process are some of the funniest, most compassionate, and talented people I have ever had the pleasure of knowing."

SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST TALKS ABOUT OUTCASTING: Dr. Mitch Shapiro of Edgemont Junior-Senior High School:

"Marc's program gives students a unique opportunity to find themselves and each other and gives them a safe haven to express their ideas. In addition, it allows them to meet interesting people, learn about their struggles and learn media skills that will potentially benefit those who end up pursuing careers in media or broadcasting. Mostly, the program gives teens a chance to tell the world about what it's like to be an LGBTQIA+ teen (or ally) in today's increasingly polarized culture which is something that no other legitimate outlet will allow."

OUTCASTING IN THE MEDIA:

Pacifica Congratulates Marc Sophos, Executive Producer of OutCasting, Named 2018 AARP Purpose Prize Fellow – Pacifica Radio Network

"When do [the media talk] about LGBTQ youth?' Sophos considered. 'When they kill themselves. You've got the obligatory television news story with the candlelight vigil, and the kids crying, saying they didn't see this coming.... but nothing else, no context, no questions. What issues were going on in their lives? Is being LGBTQ a risk factor for suicide?"

Young, Queer, On the Air – The Advocate

"In-depth, well researched, and punchy in the right ways... NPR-level production values.... What makes all this remarkable is that most of the people working on the show... are barely old enough to drive."

Public radio gives LGBT youth a voice — GLAAD

"... some of the most honest and accurate representations of LGBT and allied youth in the media"

'Outcasting' Radio Program Elevates Lives Of Queer Youth — Huffington Post

"[OutCasting] injects an LGBT narrative into the conversation surrounding mainstream radio that historically lacks this kind of perspective."

OUTCASTING GUESTS have included:

- The legendary activist who created the Rainbow Flag
- The first openly gay bishop in the Episcopal Church whose ordination precipitated a worldwide split in the church
- Elected officials advancing equality and education issues
- Civil rights attorneys who play major roles in the movement for equality

TOPICS have included:

- Bullying and teen suicide prevention

- LGBTQ youth in locker rooms and bathrooms
- Issues faced by trans people in sports
- LGBTQ issues in education and religion
- How to be a good straight ally
- Coming out of the closet and being forced back in
- Why LGBTQ youth have to lie
- Conversion therapy
- Healthy teen relationships
- The importance of safe spaces
- LGBTQ history and activism
- Similarities and differences between Covid and AIDS

LOCAL SCHOOLS PARTICIPATING: Over the years, some 60 students have participated from schools including Brewster, Briarcliff, Chappaqua (Horace Greeley), Clarkstown North, Clarkstown South, Croton-Harmon, Dobbs Ferry, Eastchester, Edgemont, Hastings, Masters, New Rochelle, Ossining, Pelham, Pleasantville, Port Chester, Rye Country Day, Rye Neck, Scarsdale, and Walter Panas, as well as Manhattanville and Hunter Colleges.

OUR OUTREACH EFFORTS: Throughout OutCasting's history, all of our student participants have joined after a visit from me or another OutCasting producer to schools' GSAs.

Meeting with GSAs is a natural fit because students in these groups, even if they're not LGBTQ themselves, are interested in these issues.

But this method has not allowed us to reach students who may be interested but aren't members of the GSA. Additionally, it has become increasingly difficult in the past several years for us to make contact with GSA advisors, and this is also limiting the number of new students we can bring in.

WHAT WE'RE ASKING: We are therefore reaching out to you in the hope that you'll help spread the word more broadly among your students, faculty, staff, and administration so that more students have the opportunity to join this powerful program. It would be particularly helpful if they could view the short video about youth experiences at OutCasting available at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o6lTtcGhJRU>

I will be happy to speak with you and members of your school community about OutCasting and to speak directly with students about joining, either virtually or in person. Please let me know if we can arrange this.

Appended below (in red) is information you can send directly to students. Please feel free to share it with students throughout your school via email, social media, etc.

PLEASE REPLY. I would very much appreciate it if you can **send me a quick reply** to let me know you've received this email. I know that you're fully occupied, but there are some 80 schools within our area, and with multiple contacts at each school, outreach is extremely difficult and time consuming. We're a small organization and I currently do all of the outreach myself, so just letting me know that you received this will be most helpful.

Also, if you're able to share it with other personnel within the school, **please let me know if I should follow up** personally with them.

And finally, if you're connected with people at other schools or organizations where there might be interested students, please feel free to share this information with them.

WHY OUTCASTING? I'm a broadcast professional with decades of experience at NPR, Westchester Public Radio (of which I was the founder), and several commercial and noncommercial (public) radio stations. I grew up in Dobbs Ferry, closeted, isolated, and profoundly depressed at a time when LGBTQ identities just weren't discussed.

Things are generally better now, but high levels of bullying, substance abuse, family rejection, homelessness, and suicide continue among LGBTQ youth, and for many, being LGBTQ is a very troubling aspect of their identity. Through OutCasting, I'm working to provide the kind of resource for young people that could have done so much for me if it had existed at the time.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

All my best,

Marc

Marc Sophos, BA, JD

Executive Director, Media for the Public Good, Inc.

Executive Producer, OutCasting Media, creator of public radio's LGBTQ youth programs

Pronouns: he/him/his

Uniting LGBTQ youth, straight allies, and the power of media in advocacy for a less unjust world

OutCasting Media

<https://mfpg.org>

INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS

This is a copy-and-pastable invitation to students to join OutCasting, public radio's award-winning nationally-distributed LGBTQ youth programs. If you can make it available to them via e-mail, social media, or whatever's most convenient, that would be great.

Students — You're invited to apply to join OutCasting Media, which produces public radio's nationally-distributed LGBTQ youth programs and podcasts. It's a rare opportunity to be part of a highly meaningful experience, explore LGBTQ issues in depth with noted experts, connect with the larger LGBTQ community, and join in the movement for LGBTQ equality.

Along the way, you'll gain important skills in journalism, interviewing, researching, writing and speaking for broadcast, and more. Graduates of our program report that participation in OutCasting is a stellar experience to have on college and job applications.

LGBTQ students (out or closeted) and straight allies are welcome.

Here's a video showing what it's like:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o6lTtcGhJRU>

If you're interested, please fill out the form here:

<https://mfpg.org/apply>

Then we'll talk and see if you're a good fit for OutCasting. Filling out the form doesn't obligate you to join; it's just the first step in getting in touch with each other.

Thanks!

Marc Sophos (producer)