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Funder's Perspective: Building The HIVE

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# *The HIVE*

*Prevention is a Solution!*

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## Funder's Perspective: Building the HIVE

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As one of the only funders solely supporting grassroots efforts to reducing HIV vulnerabilities amongst gay men, other men who have sex with men (MSM) and transgender individuals in the Global South, I take extreme pride in writing this perspective on building the HIVE. Clearly, gay men, other MSM and transgender individuals have been forgotten in both generalised HIV epidemics and more population specific epidemics, an unfounded scenario that is rooted in stigma and discrimination. As it was in the beginning of the HIV epidemic in the Global North, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) leaders in the Global South have recognised the need to organise on their own to save the lives of their brothers and sisters whom governments and more mainstream civil society colleagues have neglected.

Back in 1996, I helped launch one of the first ever interactive websites for and by LGBT youth in the United States. [www.youthresource.com](http://www.youthresource.com) was revolutionary in its time towards effecting social change by providing a website by and for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth that takes a holistic approach to sexual health and issues of concern to queer youth. Today, utilising digital media is clearly seen as a modern form of community organising. These participatory interactive formats are engaging for young people, and offer anonymity in interacting with others to gain knowledge and motivation to be healthy and practice safer sex. The anonymity is exceptionally important to LGBT individuals and other MSM because social stigma and discrimination continue to be very challenging. Similarly, anonymity regarding HIV positive status among these individuals is equally stigmatising, yet digital media and social networking now offer support and motivation.

Digital technologies have revolutionised community-led efforts to reduce the spread and impact of HIV amongst LGBT individuals and other MSM. amfAR, the Foundation for AIDS Research, currently supports over 45 LGBT/MSM-led community organisations and projects, many of whom use various electronic means (interactive websites; dialogue and outreach in chat rooms; Facebook promotions, etc.) to reach LGBT individuals and other MSM with life saving information and motivation to be healthier by connecting with organisations that offer a variety of health, social and legal resources.

However, I recognize the limits of technology. For example, just the other day, someone was cautioning condom promotion through digital means, as there is nothing more educative than 'hands-on' education, which is often not possible in communication through digital means. As well, issues of language hamper digital efforts; however, technology is quickly solving its own problems, such as instant translation services which allow for multiple languages.

I commend the mentors, researchers, activists and frontline workers who collaborated to build The HIVE. Such a project and model is truly changing the world by opening up new channels that link practitioners together for making and sharing innovative approaches with larger global audiences. I also will continue to advocate for additional funding streams in support of digital and networking technologies—as a means to reduce HIV vulnerabilities—among LGBT individuals and other MSM, as

well as build a networked community in the struggle for greater access to health services and the promotion of human rights for all.

## **Biographical Statement**

*Kent Klindera* is the Director of the MSM Initiative at amfAR, the Foundation for AIDS Research, based in New York City; USA. The MSM Initiative strategically invests in direct service, advocacy, and capacity-building programming with over 45 frontline organisations in the Global South, working to reduce the spread and impact of HIV among gay men, other MSM and transgender individuals. Prior to joining amfAR, Kent served as a regional technical advisor with EngenderHealth based in Johannesburg, South Africa, as well as a ten-year tenure with the Washington-DC-based Advocates for Youth. Kent holds a BS from the University of Iowa (USA) and an MPH from the University of Minnesota (USA).

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