

# Overview of Gay-Straight Alliances

## What is a Gay-Straight Alliance?

A Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) is a student-run club, typically in a high school, which provides a safe place for students to meet, support each other, talk about issues related to sexual orientation, and work to end homophobia and transphobia. Many GSAs function as a support group and provide safety and confidentiality to students who are struggling with their identity as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning.

In addition to support, some GSAs work on educating themselves and the broader school community about sexual orientation and gender identity issues. They may bring in outside speakers to cover a particular topic such as LGBTQ history. They may organize a "Pride Week" or "LGBTQ Awareness Events" and offer a series of educational workshops, panels, and pride celebrations. Many participate in the Day of Silence, a day when participants remain silent all day as a way of acknowledging the silence induced by homophobia in our society. Some GSAs organize a "Teach the Teachers" staff development day which focuses on teaching school staff how to be better allies for LGBTQ students. For example, GSA members would present scenarios about discrimination or harassment and get teachers to brainstorm how to respond to those situations.

Other GSAs are activist clubs and have worked to get LGBTQ issues represented in the curriculum, LGBTQ related books in the library, and progressive non-discrimination policies implemented at a district level. For example, many GSAs in California are working to insure that their school district implements AB 537, California's School Safety and Violence Prevention Act that prohibits discrimination in schools on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity. Additionally, many GSAs have participated in activism outside of their school on a city or state level.

All of these different types of GSAs also provide a social outlet for LGBTQ students and straight allies. Lots of GSAs organize barbecues or movie nights, go to a local LGBT Prom or a local LGBT Pride Parade, and attend conferences together. GSAs are a great way to build community at your school and lessen the isolation that LGBTQ students might otherwise experience.



For more information and resources for Gay-Straight Alliances, contact GSA Network:

Statewide Office: 1550 Bryant Street #800, San Francisco, CA 94103, ph: 415.552.4229, f: 415.552.4729

Central Valley Office: 928 N. Van Ness Ave. Fresno, CA 93728, ph: 559.268.2780, f: 559.268.2786

Southern California Office: 605 W. Olympic Blvd, Suite 610, Los Angeles, CA 90015, ph: 213.534.7162,

www.gsanetwork.org f: 213.553.1833

# How to Start a Gay-Straight Alliance

## 1. Follow Guidelines

Establish a GSA the same way you would establish any other group or club. Look in your Student Handbook for your school's rules. This may include getting permission from an administrator or writing a constitution.

## 2. Find a Faculty Advisor

Find a teacher or staff member whom you think would be supportive or who has already shown themselves to be an ally around sexual orientation issues. It could be a teacher, counselor, nurse, or librarian.

## 3. Inform Administration of Your Plans

Tell administrators what you are doing right away. It can be very helpful to have them on your side. They can work as liaisons to teachers, parents, community members, and the school board. If an administrator opposes the GSA, inform them that forming a GSA club is protected under the Federal Equal Access Act.

## 4. Inform Guidance Counselors and Social Workers About The Group

These individuals may know students who would be interested in attending the group.

## 5. Pick a Meeting Place

You may want to find a meeting place which is off the beaten track at school and offers some level of privacy.

## 6. Advertise

Figure out the best way to advertise at your school. It may be a combination of your school bulletin, flyers, and word-of-mouth. If your flyers are defaced or torn down, do not be discouraged. Keep putting them back up. Eventually, whom-ever is tearing them down will give up. Besides, advertising for your group and having words up such as "gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or questioning" or "end homophobia" can be part of educating the school and can actually make other students feel safer – even if they never attend a single meeting.

## 7. Get Food

This one is kind of obvious. People always come to meetings when you provide food!

## 8. Hold Your Meeting!

You may want to start out with a discussion about why people feel having this group is important. You can also brainstorm things your club would like to do this year.

## 9. Establish Ground Rules

Many groups have ground rules in order to insure that group discussions are safe, confidential, and respectful. Many groups have a ground rule that no assumptions or labels are used about a group member's sexual orientation. This can help make straight allies feel comfortable about attending the club.

## 10. Plan For The Future

Develop an action plan. Brainstorm activities. Set goals for what you want to work towards. Contact Gay-Straight Alliance Network in order to get connected to other GSAs, get supported, and learn about what else is going on in the community.



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# Fun Things To Do With Your GSA

## 1. Movie Night

Attend a screening of an LGBT themed film at a local theatre, or if you have a big enough group, consider arranging a special showing. You can also rent movies and get together to watch them and hang out.

## 2. Host a BBQ or Picnic

Involve the other GSAs in your area for a potluck picnic or BBQ. You can have the event in a public park or in someone's back yard. If it's fun, consider having one once a quarter or semester, or at the end of the school year.

## 3. Plan a Pride Dance or go to a LGBTQ dance in your area

Dances can be a great way to bring GSA members together and reach out to the school community, and Pride Proms are the highlight of the year's social activities for many GSAs. Large dances require a lot of planning, so it's a good idea to have several GSAs sponsor and coordinate the event. If you don't want to plan your own, look into a LGBTQ dance in your area.

## 4. Plan Outdoor Activities

Meet at a park to play frisbee, softball, flag football, or whatever you want. These activities can be combined with a BBQ and are a great way to network and socialize with other GSAs. Or plan a hiking or camping trip.

## 5. Get together with other GSAs or student clubs on campus or at a local queer or queer-friendly cafe

It's cool to just hang out in a "safe-space" and chat - and it's good to get to know GSA members from other schools. Building coalitions with GSAs at other schools or getting together with different student clubs can be a great way to share stories, get advice, plan events, learn from each other, and have fun!

## 6. Arts and Crafts

Get together after school or during lunch and make your own pride gear, a banner to use in marches, or art to display in the library and display cases.

## 7. Hold a Pride Party (or any party!)

Who needs a good excuse to party?! Be creative with food and decorations -- there are lots of possibilities.

## 8. Organize local bands or performers to do a show

If you can't hold this at your school, contact a local community college, friendly church (e.g. UnitarianUniversalist Church) or synagogue (e.g. Reconstructionist or Reform synagogues), or your local rec center and ask to use their space. This event could also serve as a fundraiser for your club.

## 9. Host a senior graduation party

"Lavender graduations" are a neat way to show appreciation for the seniors in your club and give them a meaningful send-off. Consider investing in small gifts to present to graduating seniors at an end of the year event.

## 10. Plan or go to local rallies, student protests, or lobbying events

It is always exciting to actively make change! There are always rallies, protests, and lobbying events you can find out about or learn from others on how to plan your own!

## 11. Host an awareness day at your school

Bring speakers, host workshops, have entertainment, and raise awareness about LGBTQ issues at your school!

## 12. Check out Youth Resource's 95 ideas for student clubs

Go to [http://www.youthresource.com/advocacy/school\\_scene/ideas/95\\_ideas.htm](http://www.youthresource.com/advocacy/school_scene/ideas/95_ideas.htm) and get new ideas for fun things to do with your GSA!



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# How to Plan an Event

## Work Plan

When planning events and projects as a GSA, it will be helpful to create a “work plan.” This document will cover details of the planning process and designate responsibility for different tasks. Taking the time to make one at the outset will help your group stay organized and focused. This document will also address issues that your GSA should keep in mind while planning your event.

### Here’s what to include on your work plan:

1. A brief description of the project/event.
2. Dates for the planning period.
3. Date(s) for the project/event.
4. Goals (broad things you are working toward – this project/event is part of that work).
5. Objectives (concrete things that this specific project will accomplish by its end).
6. Strategies/steps for planning the project/event. Be detailed and specific!
7. Dates for each step of the planning process to be completed by – and stick to them!
8. Indication of who is responsible for each step. Delegate and spread leadership.
9. List of materials that will be needed for the project/event and who is responsible for them.
10. A description of how the project/event will be evaluated and who will conduct and analyze the evaluation results.

**Don’t forget to document all of your work (work plan, planning meeting agendas, etc.) and save it in a folder so that future planners can reference it. If you have access to the equipment, you may want to also videotape or tape record the event, not only for future leaders but also for members who couldn’t attend the event.**

## Strategies

### Advertising:

When advertising for your project/event don’t just announce it to your GSA. Think about other audiences who might be interested in attending. For example, invite other diversity or civil rights groups on your campus. In addition, keep staff, faculty, and administrators in mind. Your project/event may be a great way to educate them.

### Co-Sponsorship:

Joint projects are a great way to develop relationships with other groups and build allies. Approach various groups and see if they want to be involved in putting on a project/event that addresses issues you are both dealing with. Keep in mind that there are several ways for groups or individuals to help co-sponsor your project/event. Money is an obvious method of contribution, but groups may also help with flyering, postermaking, making copies, or volunteering at the event. Above all, make sure to be fair when distributing the credit – be sure to recognize everyone who participated.

## Accessibility

### Space/Location:

This one is important for obvious reasons – you want a space where people will safely attend your project/event. However, you also want to think about whether the location is accessible to various people. Is it in a place that is easy to find? What about wheelchair accessibility?

### Hearing Impaired:

It is important for us to remember that the LGBT community includes people from all backgrounds and abilities. Do some research on your campus to find out if there is anyone who knows sign language who can volunteer their time. Having a signer at your project/event is an important way to be inclusive of the deaf community. Depending on the event, you may want to get a manuscript of the performance ahead of time to make it easier on the interpreters.

### Language:

Language is a common barrier that students face at their school. Make sure your flyers are translated into multiple languages to reach a broader audience. Collaborate with other clubs on campus to help bring in bi-lingual speakers or have bi-lingual students be able to translate at the event. If you are showing a video, make sure it has subtitles in other languages.



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### General Access:

There are many things to keep in mind to be sensitive to the socio-economic diversity in your GSA and community. Recognize that people have varying access to resources including money, cars, computers, etc. Make sure that your project/event is accessible through public transportation. In addition, try to coordinate carpooling. When deciding on the cost of your project/event consider a sliding scale. For example, students pay less than adults or you can ask patrons to pay what they can afford. Of course, you can always try to do enough fundraising so the event is free!

## Evaluation

It is always a good idea to evaluate your project/event. Not just to see if people enjoyed it, but also as a way to measure the diversity of the issues and communities you address and represent. Take the evaluation seriously. It is a great way to look at the work you are doing and to get input and feedback from your audience. Upon looking at the evaluation results, ask yourself the following questions: How diverse are the projects/events we are hosting? Are we reaching any new audiences? What topics haven't we explored?

### Sample Evaluations

You want to have two versions of an evaluation; one for the presenter(s) and one for the audience. Feel free to duplicate these evaluations or alter them as you see fit. Whenever asking questions about one's identity, it is always recommended to let the individual fill out the information rather than you assuming an identity for them.

#### Presenter

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Title of Event: \_\_\_\_\_ Theme/Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

Format: VIDEO WORKSHOP LECTURE DISCUSSION PERFORMANCE OTHER: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Race(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Sexual Orientation: \_\_\_\_\_ Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

How do you feel the event went? What could make it better?

#### Audience

Title of Event: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade: \_\_\_\_\_ Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

Sexual Orientation: \_\_\_\_\_ Race(s): \_\_\_\_\_

On a scale of 1-5, 5 being the highest, how would you rate this event? (Circle One)

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

Ever been to the GSA before?                      YES                      NO

Ever been to one of our events before?                      YES                      NO

How did you hear about this event?

FLYER POSTER FRIEND ANNOUNCEMENT E-MAIL OTHER: \_\_\_\_\_

What did you like about this event?

What did you dislike about this event?

What other topics would you like to see explored?

# How to Have a Kick-Ass GSA

## Establishing Your Club's Purpose

1. Decide if your GSA is a support group, activism club, or social group.
2. Write a mission statement (see the back of this sheet for samples):
  - √ address the nature of your organization and its goals in an official mission statement

## Preparing for Meetings

1. Set the agenda: make a list of issues and topics to be discussed at each meeting
2. Publicize the meeting:
  - √ figure out the best ways to reach as many people as possible in your school and make announcements (e.g. daily announcements, flyers, posters)
  - √ designate a "publicity queen" to be in charge of all publicity each week
3. Bring food:
  - √ buy food if your club has money already or create a club donation jar that says "\$ for snacks"

## Running a Good Meeting

1. Ground Rules:
  - √ to make sure the group members feel safe, establish ground rules such as respect and confidentiality
2. Decision Making:
  - √ figure out how your group will make decisions: majority vote, consensus, dictatorship?
3. Facilitator:
  - √ designate someone to keep the group focused on the meeting agenda
  - √ make sure people are not feeling ignored and that the group remains respectful
4. Notes:
  - √ take minutes at each meeting for members who couldn't attend
  - √ post the notes on a GSA bulletin board or web page so students can read them anonymously
5. Create a question box for suggestions or comments

## Creating an Action Plan

1. Have a brainstorming session.
  - √ only think of projects ONCE at a brainstorming meetings
  - √ set your ideas into a list of priorities and concentrate on the top three
2. Set up committees.
  - √ make each project a committee and appoint a leader to organize the specific project
  - √ spread the leadership
3. Set tentative dates.
  - √ put deadlines, dates of meetings, or anything else into official school calendars
  - √ follow a schedule and take your deadlines seriously
4. Have sub-Committee Meetings.
  - √ Committees working on projects should meet separately from the regular GSA meeting and report back to the GSA. This ensures that GSA members not interested in the project still have a place in meetings, while allowing committees to get more specific work completed.



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# Sample Mission Statements

There are many different reasons to have a GSA at your school. Some students want a safe place to hang out and feel free to be who they are. Others need a supportive place to talk about what's going on in their lives. Then there are groups that want to create a school free of homophobia by implementing LGBTQ issues in their education. Many schools require a club to write a constitution or a document stating their purpose. Your GSA should decide what type of group they want to be. Does your club want to be an Activist, Social or Support GSA? Maybe you want to use parts of the different types of GSAs and create your own unique group. These are a few sample mission statements to help your GSA get started. This is an opportunity to create your GSA's identity.

## **Activist Mission Statement (Organize...Creating Change...Action!!)**

The Bayard Rustin GSA brings together queer youth and straight allies to fight homophobia on campus and in the community. By raising awareness of different sexual and gender identities, linking homophobia with other oppressions, and advocating for equal treatment for youth of all sexual orientations, our GSA will create a school environment free of homophobic, sexual, verbal, and physical harassment.

## **Social Mission Statement (Fun...Hang Out...A Place To Be Free!!)**

The Fiesta High School GSA brings students of different sexual and gender identities together to meet new people, hang out, eat food, and have fun. We will coordinate outings, dances, movie nights, and other activities. Through acceptance at all our activities we will reduce isolation and depression.

## **Support Mission Statement (What's on your mind...Let's Talk!!)**

The Rainbow Connection welcomes all lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning and straight youth to come and talk about any issues concerning them. Listening is our main objective and members can bring up personal issues they are facing. By using one-on-one or group discussion, we hope to create a safe place to offer support, resources, and alternative outlets for emotion.

# Transgender Inclusivity in GSAs

GSAs can be a powerful force in the fight against discrimination on the basis of gender identity and gender nonconformity, issues which are often at the root of homophobic harassment. However, many GSAs have not yet addressed gender/transgender issues because they do not know how to go about it. Here are some tips and suggested activities that can be used to help your GSA become more gender-inclusive, begin talking about gender and transgender issues, and make your school safer for transgender or gender-questioning students.

**1. When your GSA asks for gender on a form or a survey don't have people mark either male or female.** Leave a blank line and allow people to write it in.

**2. Don't separate your GSA into "boys" and "girls" for activities.**

**3. As a GSA, watch and discuss movies with gender nonconformist characters.** Examples include Boys Don't Cry, My Life in Pink (Ma Vie en Rose), All About My Mother, Salmonberries, Just one of the Guys, Something Special, Priscilla Queen of the Desert. Consider hosting a screening of one of these movies as an educational event at your school, or design a curriculum for teachers to use if they show one of these films in class.

**4. Bring in books and newspaper articles about people who are transgender. Talk about them in your GSA.**

**5. Research statistics about transgender-related harassment and use them in your outreach & publicity materials.**

**6. Be sure to include gender identity issues in your plans to implement AB 537 (the California Student Safety and Violence Prevention Act) at your school.** Gender nonconformity is covered along with sexual orientation in this anti-discrimination law.

**7. Campaign to create a unisex bathroom at your school.** Write a proposal to the principal and the staff. Tell them you think that there should be one bathroom (that is not used very much, such as in the nurse's office) which is open to anyone. Let them understand that you want a safe space where a student of any sex, gender, or gender identity can change for a sport or use the bathroom and feel safe.

**8. Design and lead a gender sensitivity training for students and/or teachers at your school.** Consider using the following activities to get folks talking about gender categories and gender-related expectations\*\*:

- Give everyone a chance to chose pictures of people out of magazines or books (ask them not to show anyone their picture). Ask everyone to describe the person without referring to the person's "privates" or using pronouns that we associate with a specific gender. Have each person read aloud their description and then have everyone "guess" the gender. Here are a list of questions you can use for discussion when the "guessing" is done: Why did you associate some adjectives with men or women? Is something wrong with a person whose attributes are not considered normal for their gender? Why or why not? Can someone be both masculine and feminine and does that change their gender?
- Break everyone into small groups (or one-on-one if your group is small already) and give each person a bag of mixed jelly beans or M&M's (anything will work as long as they are the same size and shape and that they do vary in color). Tell each group to divide their bag up into two categories, using any criteria they can think of. Give people as much time as they need. Here are some follow-up questions. How did you divide up the contents of the bag? Was it hard to think of criteria? Can some objects fit into both categories? If not, can you think of an instance when an object could? Or where one couldn't fit into either group? Do you think some people don't fit into one particular gender category? Do you think if someone has the body of a "man" and acts like a "woman" (or vice-versa) that they should alter their body or dress/style to fit the gender that they act like? Why or why not?

**9. Get a copy of *My Gender Workbook* by Kate Bornstein for your club.** Look through the book for other activities to use both within your club and for outreach or education purposes.

**10. Always keep in mind that when you talk about gender not to make a huge issue out of it; allow people to feel comfortable.** If you sensationalize people who are transgender or questioning (and members of your GSA may be struggling with issues of gender identity) you may make them feel even more uncomfortable or confused. You want to create a safe place for your peers.

\*\* These activities were designed by GSA Network Youth Council Member Max Cohen. If you wish to republish them, please contact GSA Network.

**Look on the back of this sheet for gender and sexual orientation terms and definitions!**



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# Gender and Sexual Orientation Terms and Definitions

**Androgynous:** a term for a person who expresses or presents merged socially-defined masculine and feminine characteristics, or mainly neutral characteristics.

**Bisexual:** a person who is emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to men and women.

**Crossdressing (CD):** dressing as someone from a different gender category; may be done by people from all genders and sexual orientations. Crossdressers sometimes referred to as transvestites (TV).

**Drag:** crossdressing, especially in public or in a performance.

**Feminine:** concept of what is "naturally" or traditionally female in terms of appearance, behavior, and personality.

**Gay:** a person who identifies as a man who is emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to men.

**Gender Binary System:** a social system that requires everyone to be raised as a boy or girl (dependent on what sex you are assigned at birth), which in turn forms the basis for how you are educated, what jobs you can do (or are expected to do), how you are expected to behave, what you are expected to wear, what your gender and gender presentation should be, and who you should be attracted to/love/marry, etc.

**Gender Characteristics:** characteristics that are used by others to attribute gender to an individual, such as facial hair or vocal pitch.

**Gender Expression/Gender Presentation:** the way a person expresses his or her gender through gestures, movement, dress, and grooming.

**Gender Identity:** a person's understanding, definition, or experience of their own gender, regardless of biological sex.

**Gender Nonconformity:** not expressing gender or not having gender characteristics or gender identity that conform to the expectations of society and culture.

**Genderqueer:** a term which is used by some people who may or may not fit on the spectrum of trans, or be labeled as trans, but who identify their gender and sexual orientation to be outside of the gender binary system, or culturally prescribed gender roles.

**Gender Role:** culturally accepted and expected behavior associated with biological sex.

**Intersex:** refers to a series of medical conditions in which a child's genetic sex (chromosomes) and phenotypic sex (genital appearance) do not match, or are somehow different from the "standard" male or female. About one in 2,000 babies are born visibly intersexed, while some others are detected later. For more information, please visit <http://www.intersexinitiative.org>.

**Lesbian:** a person who identifies as a woman who is emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to women.

**Masculine:** concept of what is "naturally" or traditionally male in terms of appearance, behavior, and personality.

**Pansexual:** a person who is emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to folks of all genders.

**Passing:** crossdressing well enough to be seen as a member of a different sex/gender category.

**Sex:** one's biological assignment as male, female, or intersexed.

**Transgender (TG):** a term for designating those who transcend or transgress gender by not looking, acting, being, or identifying as traditionally male or female; can include crossdressers, transsexuals, intersex people, and other gender nonconformists.

**Transsexual (TS):** a person who feels that his or her gender identity does not match their biological sex ("I'm a woman in a man's body" etc.); a pre-op (preoperative) transsexual is a TS preparing to have sex reassignment surgery, and a post-op (postoperative) transsexual has already undergone sex reassignment, although not all transsexuals desire surgery; some transsexuals take hormones to make their bodies look more male or female.



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# Building Anti-Racist GSAs

**Multi-issue organizing is a strong and powerful way to incorporate all aspects of a community and the people it is made up of. The LGBTQ youth movement cannot survive unless it includes people of color and addresses issues of sexism, racism, classism, ageism, and environmental injustice. We must link ourselves together to create a multi issue social justice movement which incorporates the needs and rights of multiple communities.**

**However, many GSAs have struggled with multi-issue organizing because of a lack of internal diversity. There are a number of reasons why students of color may not be as actively involved with GSAs as white students. GSA organizers from around the Bay Area came up with these ideas about why many GSAs are disproportionately white:**

- **Perception that Gay = White:** Most national LGBTQ leaders and famous queer folks are white, and people of color are often under-represented at LGBTQ events.
- **Tokenization:** If a GSA is already mostly or all white, students may feel that being the only person of color at meetings would put pressure on them to educate the rest of the club about diversity or racism.
- **Language barriers:** Especially if your school has a large population of students who do not speak English as a primary language, creating all of the GSA's flyers and materials in English may send a message that the club would not be a comfortable place for some students.
- **Cultural barriers:** Sexual orientation and homophobia are understood and acknowledged differently by different cultures. Many organizations that deal with LGBTQ issues are ethnocentric and fail to recognize that sexual orientation and homophobia may have different associations and implications for people with different backgrounds.
- **Prioritizing identities:** Many LGBTQ youth of color have described the alienating experience of having to choose one identity over another. For example, if they've been part of a racial/ethnic club at school they feel forced to hide their sexual orientation or gender identity. Conversely, if they've attended the GSA, they've felt forced to ignore or downplay their racial/ethnic identity.

**Here are some broad strategies that GSAs can use to address these issues and build diverse, anti-racist organizations:**

## **Engage Straight People of Color as Allies.**

- Organize around health, oppression, public policy, school policy, and other points of multi-issue or coalition-based organizing
- Go to diversity club meetings and/or set up an umbrella "Diversity" or "Multicultural" club at your school.

## **Welcome LGBTQ People of Color.**

- Focus GSA organizing and activities on multiple issues.
- Invite queer people of color to visit your GSA/school as speakers or trainers.
- Create materials in different languages.

## **Educate the GSA.**

- Have an anti-oppression/anti-racism workshop.
- Engage in a dialogue about racism within the school and/or within the LGBTQ community.
- Have different student clubs give trainings/facilitate dialogues for your GSA (and see if other clubs would like the GSA to lead an anti-homophobia workshop at one of their meetings).

## **Build Coalitions.**

Coalitions unite different organizations around a common issue, such as ending hate crimes at your school. Coalitions work together to organize campaigns and sponsor activities that help meet common goals. Consider having long-term coalitions with other diversity-focused groups at your school that encourage members to form personal as well as organizational relationships. This will help straight people of color become more familiar with the GSA and not force queer people of color to choose between one club activity or the other.

### **Here are some ideas for activities you can organize as a coalition:**

- Put together a photo exhibit on diverse families.
- Bring the AIDS quilt to school.
- Organize a rally, assembly, protest, or peer-education program about hate crimes.
- Have a voter registration drive for seniors.
- Host a diversity-themed film festival, poetry slam, or concert.



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# Peer Education Workshops

**Educating your peers about issues of sexual orientation and homophobia can be one of the most effective ways to make your school safer for LGBTQ students, and GSAs are a great framework for implementing an anti-homophobia peer education program. If your GSA is planning to organize and lead classroom anti-homophobia workshops, keep these things in mind as you go along:**

## **Ahead of Time:**

### **Consider attending a formal training.**

The GSA Network offers trainings for potential anti-homophobia peer educators – we'll tell you everything you need to know about developing and leading classroom workshops. Call our office to set up a training at your school or in your area.

### **Figure out what you need to do to get the workshop(s) approved by the school.**

Talk to your advisor and meet with administrators and/or other faculty members. Present them with a potential workshop agenda and be able to tell them why you think this is an important thing to do.

### **Find a teacher.**

Find a teacher who is supportive and who thinks their class would be receptive to your presentation. This may be a teacher who attends GSA meetings or one you know is supportive in other ways. Often, health teachers and social studies teachers are interested in having this topic discussed in their class. Talk with them about how they can support you and discuss how they will handle any disruptions that might occur.

### **Guage the climate of the classroom.**

Talk with the teacher or give a pre-workshop survey to find out what folks already know, what they have misconceptions about, and what they want to learn.

### **Practice!**

## **In the Classroom:**

### **Draw connections.**

Try to draw connections between your workshop and what the teacher is teaching. (Psychology is obvious, as is Health/Family Life. A less obvious one would be History, and tying it into the civil rights studies... etc.)

### **Invite an administrator or another teacher.**

Invite a supportive Administrator to see your workshop if you'd like to do it in other classes. Also, other teachers might like to see what you propose doing in their classes, so feel free to invite them.

### **Make it clear that you do not speak for the entire LGBTQ community.**

Make this disclaimer known at the beginning of the workshop. You do not speak for every LGBTQ individual in the world, and you shouldn't be expected to represent your entire community. You can only speak from your personal experience. (Use "I" statements.)

### **Define and clarify the terms you use.**

Not everyone will be as versed as you in LGBTQ issues and language. You should define the terms you use, such as "sexual orientation" or gender identity," to make sure that everyone understands what you mean. If you decide to use words such as "queer" or "dyke," you should also discuss what they mean to you and why you are choosing to use them when others may not.

### **Not everyone will agree with you.**

The entire reason you are doing the Anti-Homophobia workshop is to increase awareness. People will disagree with you, and that's okay as long as they are not disruptive to the workshop. Be accepting of others' beliefs.

### **Stick to your purpose**

You are there to do an anti-homophobia workshop, not a sex education workshop. Unfortunately, for many people the instant you mention "gay," they think sex. An anti-homophobia workshop is about making schools safer – free from harassment and violence.

### **Be Honest.**

Above all else, be honest about what you know. If you don't know an answer, that's okay – just tell them that you don't know.

## **Afterward:**

### **Learn from your evaluations.**

Make sure you give folks enough time to fill them out, and be open to constructive criticism. Don't let the overly negative ones get you down, though.

**See the back of this sheet for a sample anti-homophobia workshop agenda!**



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# Sample Classroom Anti-Homophobia Workshop Agenda

## **I. INTRODUCTION (10 min)**

- A. Personal introduction (name, age, what, why you're doing this workshop, etc.)
- B. Purpose of Workshop
  1. Increase awareness of the impact that anti-gay harassment and homophobia have on students at the school
  2. Increase awareness of what homophobia is.
  3. Create a safe space for people to ask questions about LGBTQ issues
  4. Discuss how students can be better allies for LGBTQ people in schools.
- C. Ground Rules/Agreements/Norms
  1. Why is it important to have agreements? (So that people feel safe, comfortable and respected to say what's on their minds, everyone gets heard...)
  2. Put up Ground Rules: (let the class help generate these if you have time)
  3. Read off each agreement and ask participants if there are any to add (if you already generated the list)
  4. Ask everyone to agree to the Agreements/Norms/Ground Rules

## **II. TERMS & DEFINITIONS (5 min)**

- A. Go over basic LGBT terms – (Remember not everyone will be comfortable with these and many won't be familiar with "transgender")
- B. Ask for slang terms (you can discuss origins of the slang terms if you know them and have time)
- C. Ask for stereotypes (if you have time)

## **III. ACTIVITY\* (Do an activity, such as LGBTQ Bingo, that covers basic concepts and gets into the issues.) (10 min)**

- A. Say the name and purpose of the activity in your own words.
- B. Explain instructions.
- C. At the end of the exercise, ask for reflection from students on how it felt to participate in the activity.

## **IV. PERSONAL SHARING (2 speakers) (20 min)**

- A. Explain that the presenters are going to share personal stories.
- B. Mention that these personal stories are not necessarily representative of every LGBTQ person's experience.
- C. At least one of the speakers should identify as LGBTQ, but straight allies with friends or family members can also share personal stories.
- D. Each speaker gives a 5 minute highlight of their story, then allow 10 minutes to answer questions. Highlights:
  - When did you know you were gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender?
  - What is it like to be a bisexual, lesbian, gay or transgender youth in high school?
  - When you came out, were you supported by your friends? Family? Others?
  - What made it easier for you to come out?If you are a straight ally, talk about your experience in relation to homophobia. How have you experienced homophobia because you have friends or family members who are LGBTQ? How does homophobia affect your friends and family members?
- E. Ask for questions from the group.

## **V. RESOURCES AND EVALUATIONS (5 min)**

- A. Resource materials to hand out:
  1. Resource sheets such as "What Every Super-Rad Straight Ally Should Know,"\* or make one of your own. Say something like: "We hope that at the end of this workshop you will be more interested in becoming an Ally for LGBTQ people at our school."
  2. Information on community resources, such as LGBTQ youth centers, hotlines, groups, etc.
  3. Information about your GSA.
- B. Ask the students to complete the evaluation.

### **If you have more than 50 minutes...**

1. *Consider making the panel discussion longer*

For many students this may be their first chance to hear LGBTQ people speak about their experiences. Give more time for questions. Or have another panelist. It is always nice to have a Straight Ally talk about why they find it important to be an Ally.

2. *Do an agree/disagree activity\**

To get the most out of Agree/Disagree you need at least 20 minutes or longer. Also please tailor your questions to your community, in addition to the ones that are included with the instructions. This is an excellent activity to get the class thinking.

**\* Contact the GSA Network or visit our website ([www.gsanetwork.org](http://www.gsanetwork.org)) for activity descriptions, curricula, and the "What Every Super-Rad Straight Ally Should Know" resource sheet.**

*(Thanks to Catholic Charities of the East Bay for their work designing this workshop.)*

# Coalition Building

**Coalition (activist definition):** an "organization of organizations" united around a common issue and clear goal(s); however, sometimes the term "coalition" is used to refer to groups of diverse individuals or organizations of individuals who are involved in other groups as well.

**Issue:** communicates what you are fighting for to help solve your problem; an issue is what activist organizations focus on. If the problem is name-calling and slurs, your issue could be to reduce slurs.

## Questions to ask when you are thinking about building a coalition with another organization:

- What would your unifying issue(s) be?
- What resources could come from this organization?
- What obstacles might you encounter?

## Guidelines for successful coalition-building:

- 1. Choose unifying issues.** The most effective coalitions come together around a common issue. Make sure the development of group goals is a joint process, rather than one or two group representatives deciding the goals and then inviting others to join.
- 2. Understand and respect each group's self interest.** There must be a balance between the goals and needs of the coalition and of the individual organizations.
- 3. Respect each group's internal process.** It is important to understand and respect the differences among groups. These differences are often apparent in processes or chains of command for decision-making. Make a commitment to learning about the unique values, history, interests, structure, and agenda of the other groups and organizations.
- 4. Agree to disagree.**
- 5. Structure decision-making carefully.**
- 6. Distribute credit fairly.** Recognize that contributions vary. Appreciate different contributions. Each organization will have something different to offer. Each one is important, so be sure to acknowledge them all, whether they be volunteers, meeting space, funding, copying, publicity, leafleting, passing resolutions, or other resources.
- 7. Give and Take.** It is important to build on existing relationships and connections with other organizations. Don't just ask for or expect support; be prepared to give it.
- 8. Develop a Common Strategy.** The strength of a coalition is in its unity. Work together with other organizations to develop a strategy that makes sense for everyone. The tactics you choose should be ones that all the organizations can endorse. If not, the tactics should be taken by individual organizations independent of the coalition.
- 9. Be Strategic.** Building coalitions in and of themselves requires a good strategy. Which organizations you ask, who asks them, and what order to ask them are all questions to figure out.
- 10. To ensure consistency, send the same representative to each coalition meeting.** This helps meetings run more smoothly. These individuals should also be decision-making members of the organizations they represent.
- 11. Formalize Your Coalition.** It is best to make explicit agreements. Make sure everyone understands what their responsibilities and rights are. Being clear can help prevent conflicts.

*This resource was adapted from the NGLTF's "Comprehensive Manual for Campus Organizing" (Shepard, Yeskel, Outcalt - 1995) and materials from the United States Student Association's Grassroots Organizing Weekend (GROW) Program.*



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# Conducting a School Survey

## Developing a school survey:

- Decide as a GSA how you want to write and conduct the survey. Divide up tasks and set deadlines. If your group is large enough, you may want to form a separate "survey committee."
- Pinpoint the specific issue(s) you would like to learn more about through the survey. For example, you might choose to focus on anti-gay slurs or teacher attitudes toward the GSA. Design several questions relating to each of these issues.
- Be sure to include demographic questions such as gender, race, and grade. This will help you organize your results later.
- Many GSAs have found that including one or two open-ended questions at the end of the survey can be a good way to generate useful and revealing information about people's attitudes. See the included survey questions and results for examples.
- Keep the survey fairly short -- it shouldn't take more than 5-10 minutes to fill out.

## Getting your survey approved:

- Show your GSA advisor a draft of your survey and ask for feedback.
- Find out how other surveys at your school are approved and follow the same process. For example, some

surveys get approved by Student Leadership. At some schools, it is wise to get the approval and/or endorsement of the principal so that if you run into any trouble with certain teachers giving out the survey you'll have the principal's support behind you. Some schools have simply approached a department chair (e.g. Social Studies or English) to help you distribute the survey through teachers in their department.

- When seeking approval, be able to articulate why you want to conduct a survey, what you hope to get out of it, and how it can benefit the larger school community.
- Develop a feasible plan for conducting the survey. Think about getting a good cross-section of the student population.
- If you don't get approval to conduct the survey in classrooms, consider handing it out at lunch time. Offer an incentive such as candy or cookies so lots of students will be interested in participating, not just those who support the GSA already.

## So we gave out a survey - now what?:

- If you use the survey on the back of this resource sheet without changing it, GSA Network will analyze the data and send you a report of the findings, including graphs of responses. Send the surveys you collect to our statewide office: GSA Network, 1550 Bryant St., Ste 800, San Francisco, CA 94103.
- Tally the results. Write up a report. Include the quantitative results for each question as well as the qualitative comments. You can also write a cover letter or introduction that gives background on why the survey was conducted and what major themes were discovered.
- Publish! Make a write up of why you did the survey, the results, quotes from respondents and submit it to your school newspaper or local city/town newspaper.
- Use survey stats to publicize your GSA meetings and raise visibility in your school through announcements, posters, and advertisements. Example: "72% of students surveyed at Alhambra said that things need to change to make LGBTQ students safer here. Now DO SOMETHING! Create change! Come to the next GSA meeting, Wednesday at 3:00 in room 100. And bring a friend."
- Identify some of the major issues with your school environment as indicated by the survey results (ie. teachers don't intervene when homophobic comments are made in the classroom) and design projects to address them
- Consider formulating the results so as to compare answers between grade levels and/or males and females.
- Think about giving out another survey at a later date to measure if your school climate is changing.

**Turn this page over for a sample survey.**



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# School Climate Survey

Your responses to this survey will be kept confidential

**sexual orientation:** describes whether a person is romantically and/or physically attracted to members of the same sex (gay or lesbian), to members of the opposite sex (heterosexual) or to members of both sexes (bisexual)  
**gender identity:** a person's understanding, definition or experience of their own gender regardless of biological sex  
**transgender:** a term for people who don't fit or identify with the gender roles assigned by society based on their biological sex

Grade:  6  7  8  9  10  11  12

Gender:  Male  Female  Transgender  Questioning  Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Sexual Orientation:

Gay/Lesbian  Bisexual  Straight/Heterosexual  Questioning  Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Race (check all that apply):

American Indian or Alaska Native  Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander  Asian  
 Black/African-American  Latino/Hispanic  White/Caucasian  Other: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Have you had education about lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) issues at school (presentations, speakers, classroom discussions)?  
 yes  no  don't know
2. Do you know of any vandalism or graffiti being directed against students at your school because people think they are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT)?  
 yes  no  don't know
3. Do you know of any physical attacks occurring against students at your school because people think they are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT)?  
 yes  no  don't know
4. During the past 12 months, how many times on school property were you harassed or bullied because you are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender or someone thought you were?  
 4 or more times  2 to 3 times  1 time  0 times
5. How often do you hear anti-LGBT slurs directed at specific students, teachers, or staff?  
 several times a day  once a day  once a week  once a month or less  never
6. How often do you hear anti-LGBT slurs at school not specifically directed at an individual (example: "that's so gay" to mean something is bad)?  
 several times a day  once a day  once a week  once a month or less  never

If you hear anti-LGBT slurs of any kind,

7. teachers or staff step in:  always  often  sometimes  never

8. you or other students step in:  always  often  sometimes  never

9. Do you know of students who openly identify as LGBT?  yes  no  don't know
10. Do you know of teachers or staff who openly identify as LGBT?  yes  no  don't know
11. If you wanted information and/or support about sexual orientation or gender identity, would you know where at school to go?  
 yes  no  don't know

12. At school, it's ok for girls to be masculine. (circle one)

Strongly Disagree                      Strongly Agree

1    2    3    4    5

13. At school, it's ok for boys to be feminine.

1    2    3    4    5

14. I feel my school is a safe place for LGBT students, teachers, and staff.

1    2    3    4    5

15. I feel safe at my school.

1    2    3    4    5

16. Is there anything your school could do to make it safer for LGBT students, teachers, and staff? Any other thoughts on these issues? \_\_\_\_\_

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Grade:  6  7  8  9  10  11  12

Gender:  Male  Female  Transgender  Questioning  Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Sexual Orientation:

Gay/Lesbian  Bisexual  Straight/Heterosexual  Questioning  Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Race (check all that apply):

American Indian or Alaska Native  Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander  Asian  
 Black/African-American  Latino/Hispanic  White/Caucasian  Other: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Have you had education about lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) issues at school (presentations, speakers, classroom discussions)?  
 yes  no  don't know
2. Do you know of any vandalism or graffiti being directed against students at your school because people think they are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT)?  
 yes  no  don't know
3. Do you know of any physical attacks occurring against students at your school because people think they are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT)?  
 yes  no  don't know
4. During the past 12 months, how many times on school property were you harassed or bullied because you are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender or someone thought you were?  
 4 or more times  2 to 3 times  1 time  0 times
5. How often do you hear anti-LGBT slurs directed at specific students, teachers, or staff?  
 several times a day  once a day  once a week  once a month or less  never
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 yes  no  don't know

- |  | Strongly Disagree |   |   |   | Strongly Agree |
|--|-------------------|---|---|---|----------------|
| 12. At school, it's ok for girls to be masculine. ( <i>circle one</i> )      | 1                 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5              |
| 13. At school, it's ok for boys to be feminine.                              | 1                 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5              |
| 14. I feel my school is a safe place for LGBT students, teachers, and staff. | 1                 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5              |
| 15. I feel safe at my school.  | 1                 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5              |

16. Is there anything your school could do to make it safer for LGBT students, teachers, and staff? Any other thoughts on these issues? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



# What Every Super-Rad Straight Ally Should Know

**One of the most unique aspects of the Gay-Straight Alliance model is that it brings together LGBTQ individuals and straight allies to combat homophobia. Here are some ways to encourage straight allies (or potential allies) to become more actively and effectively involved in your GSA.**

## TEN WAYS HOMOPHOBIA AFFECTS STRAIGHT PEOPLE

1. Homophobia forces us to act "macho" if we are a man or "feminine" if we are a woman. This limits our individuality and self-expression.
2. Homophobia puts pressure on straight people to act aggressively and angrily towards LGBTQ people.
3. Homophobia makes it hard to be close friends with someone of the same sex.
4. Homophobia often strains family and community relationships.
5. Homophobia causes youth to become sexually active before they are ready in order to prove they are "normal." This can lead to an increase in unwanted pregnancies and STDs.
6. Homophobia prevents vital information on sex and sexuality to be taught in schools. Without this information, youth are putting themselves at a greater risk for HIV and other STDs.
7. Homophobia can be used to hurt a straight person if they "appear to be gay."
8. Homophobia makes it hard for straight people and LGBTQ people to be friends.
9. Homophobia along with racism, sexism, classism, etc. makes it hard to put an end to AIDS.
10. Homophobia makes it hard to appreciate true diversity and the unique traits that are not mainstream or "normal."

For more info, see Homophobia: How We All Pay the Price, edited by Warren J. Blumenfeld, Boston: Beacon Press: 1992.

## "HOMOWORK": WAYS TO FIGHT HOMOPHOBIA AS A STRAIGHT ALLY

1. Organize discussion groups in class or after school to talk about the "Ten Ways Homophobia Affects Straight People."
2. Always use neutral labels like "partner" or "significant other" instead of "boyfriend," "girlfriend," etc. when writing papers or talking to others.
3. Bring up LGBTQ issues in conversations with friends or discussions in class.
4. Interrupt anti-LGBTQ jokes, comments or any other behaviors that make homophobia appear OK.
5. Put LGBTQ-positive posters in the halls and classrooms or wear shirts, buttons, etc. that promote tolerance.
6. Don't make assumptions about peoples' sexual orientations or gender identities. Assume there are LGBTQ people in all classes, sports, meetings, daily life, etc.
7. Don't assume that "feminine-acting men" and "masculine-acting women" are not heterosexual.
8. Don't assume that "macho males" or "feminine females" are heterosexual.



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