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Coalition Building





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Genders & Sexualities Alliance clubs have the power to fight homophobia and transphobia, as well as racism, sexism, classism, ableism, and other oppressions. How? -- you ask? Through coalition building, of course!

Coalition building is when separate groups join forces to focus on one main issue. When many different groups unite, anything is possible!

Why Build a Coalition?

Coalition building is important because:

1. There is power in numbers! With more groups involved, you are more likely to succeed.
2. You are guaranteeing a bigger impact on your campus, and ultimately, community by joining forces with other groups that may not necessarily have anything to do with the GSA at first glance.
3. Forming a coalition to work on an issue that is important to many groups gives your GSA club the chance to understand and engage in anti-oppression work beyond sexual

orientation and gender issues.

Confused? Here's an Example!

Here's a great example of coalition building that works. Every February GSAs across the country take part in [GSA Day for Racial Justice](#), ^[2] or [#GSADay4RJ](#) ^[2]. This annual event is a way for GSAs to not only celebrate Black History Month but calls on GSAs to continue to be a driving force for racial justice in their schools and communities. Many GSAs have taken time to build coalitions with Black Student Union (BSU) groups on their campuses.

We know that our communities and particularly those of us who are trans and queer youth of color experience the impacts of the patriarchy and white supremacy. We encourage GSAs to build on a foundation that celebrates and organizes our communities to address all systems of oppression.

Forming Your Coalition: How to Get Started

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 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.

Learn more about different types of coalitions in [GSA Organizing for Immigrant Rights](#)^[3] and read our blog, [Decoding the Rhetoric](#)^[4], to learn more about coalitions for safer schools.

Source URL: <https://gsanetwork.org/resources/coalition-building>

Links

[1] <https://gsanetwork.org/files/resources/CoalitionBuilding.pdf>

[2] <https://gsanetwork.org/gsaday>

[3] <https://gsanetwork.org/resources/coalition-building/gsas-and-immigration>

[4] <https://gsanetwork.org/decoding-the-rhetoric>