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## Youth FTW: GSA Network Youth Councils

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One thing is clear from last night: young people have found their voice and they are using it to change the country. Now that Prop 30 has passed, saving California schools from devastating budget cuts, we want to celebrate the young people who have, day by day, been working for change!

GSA Network regional Youth Councils have started up, launching a year of leadership, skills-building, and activism. Coming from small towns and cities across California, members meet monthly to plan GSA Network's programs, plan and present at conferences, and lead trainings and events throughout the year. Members take the responsibility seriously, knowing they represent the voices of youth activists and GSAs throughout the state.

Owen Aptekar-Cassels, a senior at DaVinci High School, joined Youth Council this year to help make a difference. "I want to do whatever I can to make a positive impact for other LGBTQ students. Youth Council is also safe space, which is really important to me," said Owen.

That's why this year's Youth Council members have big plans, including launching campaigns at

their local schools and school districts on issues such as reducing slurs, getting gender neutral bathrooms, and ensuring that social studies teachers implement the FAIR Education Act. These members get one-on-one training from regional Program Staff and get to problem-solve their issues and brainstorm ideas with their peers, who are GSA leaders just like you!



Youth Council members are also eligible to become Youth Trainers and lead trainings throughout the state on building GSAs, legal rights, and making GSAs inclusive for all. What's more is that these leaders are also planners GSA Network Conferences, including the [Youth Empowerment Summit](#) <sup>[1]</sup> (YES) and [Expression Not Suppression](#) <sup>[2]</sup> (ENS).

Of course, Youth Council members have a lot of fun, too! At the end of the year, members take field trips to the beach and the Castro in San Francisco. They also have guest speakers and workshops, and even get unique opportunities to engage with public officials. Raymond Ferronato, a senior at Antioch High School said, "I remember one of my very first Youth Council meetings, I got to be on a conference call with a representative from the White House. I couldn't believe I had the opportunity to share my opinions with people in power. It was really cool knowing that my voice mattered."

If you are a GSA leader in California and want to build your leadership, learn cool skills to do activism at your school, and have a really kick-ass time with other GSA youth, check out our [Youth Council page](#) <sup>[3]</sup> and apply to be on one of the regional Youth Councils. Northern California and Southern California currently have limited spots open. Youth Council does not meet regularly in the Central Valley, but there are other great ways to be involved including trainings and helping plan the upcoming ENS Conference in Fresno. Low-income youth, youth of color, and transgender and gender non-conforming youth are especially encouraged to apply.

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#### Links

[1] <https://gsanetwork.org/yes>

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

[3] <https://gsanetwork.org/get-involved/join-youth-council>