

GSA ADVISOR HANDBOOK



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INTRODUCTION

We Lead with Belonging, Power, and Justice: A Letter from our Leadership

Here at Genders & Sexualities Alliance Network, we believe every student deserves to feel welcomed, safe and free to be their authentic selves at school. We also know that in order to build an intersectional GSA movement for racial and gender justice, we must center the lives and leadership of trans and queer youth of color.

We've succeeded in building a movement led by young people, while still witnessing the continued and evolving violence faced by LGBTQ+ youth, especially in schools. Trans and queer youth, especially youth of color, are experiencing school pushout, basic needs insecurity, police violence, and many other forms of institutional and interpersonal violence.

The resilience of youth leaders nationwide, however, gives us hope for the more just and equitable world we're building - envisioned and led by young people themselves. But the social, economic, and health problems we're facing expose just how much our current systems do not provide real stability or support for youth.

That's why we believe so deeply in our work at GSA Network and the work being led by GSA clubs and leaders nationwide. GSA clubs have been vitally important in shifting the attitudes of the current generation of young people, and we're so proud of all the ways this work has shifted and deepened, particularly in the last decade. We're striving to create belonging, support leadership, and build a long-lasting community in and outside of schools. We believe in the power of youth to shape the world of our dreams through education, organizing, and community building.

We updated our GSA Advisor Handbook to reflect the ways the LGBTQ+ community has grown and evolved in the past decade. We're excited to share resources and tools that will support you - GSA club advisors - to create and sustain thriving GSAs in partnership with students, schools, and communities, as we move closer to our vision of trans and queer liberation.

"THE RESILIENCE OF YOUTH LEADERS NATIONWIDE ... GIVES US HOPE FOR THE MORE JUST AND EQUITABLE WORLD WE'RE BUILDING."



Geoffrey Winder & Ginna Brelsford
GSA NETWORK CO-EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS

Reader Note: This handbook was primarily designed for advisors and in it you'll access resources and tools for setting up, running, and sustaining a GSA club. You'll learn more about GSA's values and opportunities for aligning your local efforts with our national network. We also encourage youth leaders and other GSA supporters to check out this handbook to access tools and find answers to their questions.

GSA NETWORK MISSION, VISION, & APPROACH

GSA Network is a next-generation LGBTQ+ racial and gender justice organization that empowers and trains trans, queer, and allied youth leaders to advocate, organize, and mobilize an intersectional movement for safer schools and healthier communities. We offer support, resources, and leadership opportunities to middle and high school GSA clubs and leaders nationwide.

GSA clubs create space for support, organizing, and community building so that trans and queer youth have what they need to be able stay in school, become leaders who can advocate for themselves and their needs, and organize in coalition with other youth and community groups to fight for racial and gender justice.

GSA Network's approach to fighting for racial and gender justice is to work with grassroots, youth-led groups and GSAs, empowering them to educate their schools and communities, advocate for just policies that protect LGBTQ+ youth from harassment and violence, and organize in coalition with other youth groups across identity lines to address broader issues of oppression.

Following the leadership of our state and national youth councils, we launched annual days of action to spotlight our commitment to the intersectional nature of our community. GSA Day for Racial Justice is an annual call to action to mobilize for racial justice and celebrate the multiple identities held by LGBTQ+ youth. GSA Day for Gender Justice is an annual call to action for our people to center trans, nonbinary, and gender diverse people and mobilize for their liberation.

The future that we are working toward is a future where trans and queer young people, and all peoples, are alive



Youth leaders from the SoCal Youth Council gather in support of safer at schools rally.



Youth leaders building with community and leading change at GSA activist camp.

and thriving, safe from violence, and free to exist in their most authentic selves. This future includes young trans and queer people as leaders and this work today reflects that future.

OUR HISTORY

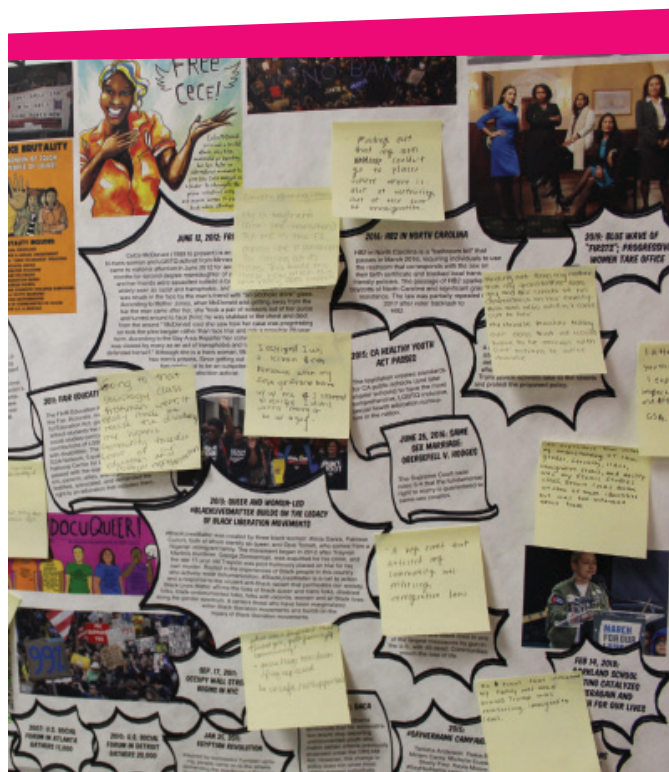
Founded in San Francisco in 1998, GSA Network emerged as a youth-driven organization that connects LGBTQ+ youth and school-based GSA clubs through peer support, leadership development, and community organizing and advocacy. Our youth leadership development model supports youth in starting, strengthening, and sustaining GSA clubs to create school communities where all students can be safe from discrimination, harassment, and violence based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. GSA organizing rapidly expanded into a national youth organizing movement that now works at the intersection of racial and gender justice.

In 2005, we led the creation of the National Association of GSA Networks to support the development of the

growing national GSA movement. Today, we work with a network of 40 statewide organizations representing more than 4,000 GSA clubs across the country. Also in 2015, GSA Network transitioned its leadership to a Co-Executive Director model and made it an organizational priority to have LGBTQ+ people of color in the top echelons of management and governance to ensure that the organizational identity reflects the identity of the LGBTQ+ youth who participate in and lead our programs.

In 2016, we formally changed our name to Genders & Sexualities Alliance Network (formerly Gay-Straight Alliance Network) after hearing from countless youth leaders who understand their genders and sexualities to be uniquely theirs and have moved beyond the labels of gay and straight, and the limits of a binary gender system. Trans and queer students continue to name their individual school-based clubs in ways that reflect the values and identities of their members.

We look forward to our next 20 years of youth leading us toward a future where trans and queer youth are safe, loved, and thriving.



Snapshots from a history documenting workshop lead by youth leaders at an activist camp.



Activist camp leaders taking part in documenting our history during workshop.



Youth leaders participating in workshop activities.

RACIAL JUSTICE & GENDER JUSTICE: VALUES THAT GUIDE US

We believe liberation cannot be reached without trans & queer youth of color.

Trans and queer people of color - particularly Black and brown trans women and girls who are the most impacted in our communities - have long been at the forefront of our movements, shaping change. Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera are just two of the countless trans women of color who've led monumental change throughout our trans and queer history.

At GSA Network, our commitment to racial and gender justice means intentionally centering trans and queer youth of color in our work. This means recognizing that when we center the needs of youth existing at these intersections, by extension, everyone's needs are met.

We all benefit from the unique vision and experiences of trans and queer youth of color who are always on the cutting edge of culture, innovating and showing us new ways of being, growing, and showing up for each other.

Our team believes in youth leadership. We recognize youth are already leaders. What they need from us - GSA advisors and other supportive adults - is resources and tools to ensure they can step into their leadership and excel. We are committed to listening to youth, believing in and learning from their experiences, and placing value in youth as experts not only of their own lives but of understanding how their experiences fit into the bigger picture of belonging, power, and justice. We are continuously pushing ourselves to ensure our support for youth organizing is effective and authentic and we rely on GSA advisors to be a partner in this effort.

At GSA Network, we've strengthened our focus on racial justice and gender justice, recognizing that for our trans and queer youth of color to be free, we must work toward intersectional liberation.

OUR VALUES INTO ACTION

To put GSA Network's racial and gender justice values into action, we encourage GSA clubs to incorporate organizing and advocacy. Getting involved in the GSA Days of Action is a great way to do this. To access more resources and tools on organizing, check out the [Annual Resource Packet](#).

"SYSTEMS ARE STRUCTURED TO DISCRIMINATE AGAINST US AND HARASS US. WHEN WE CHOOSE TO LIVE OUR TRUTH, WITH SELF CONFIDENCE & SELF LOVE, IT CREATES A RIPPLE EFFECT. I CHOOSE TO LEAD WITH LOVE AND COMPASSION."

*Curly Dynamite
National Trans Youth Council*

#GSADay4RJ

Led by youth leaders of color on our national youth councils, GSA Day for Racial Justice is our annual call to action for GSA clubs and youth to organize in support of trans and queer people of color. They lead in traditional and non-traditional ways, creating opportunities for your students to find what's best for your GSA club.

Join us every February as we organize for racial justice! You can find more information on the next GSA Day for Racial Justice on the GSA Network website leading up to the day of action.



RACIAL JUSTICE

Our commitment to racial justice is grounded in the knowledge that trans and queer youth of color face distinct challenges for their intersecting identities. We also recognize trans and queer people of color are responsible for leading us to the collective wins of the LGBTQ+ movement in the U.S. and across the globe. That's why we center and follow the leadership of our trans and queer youth of color who hold a bold vision for our collective liberation.

Our framework recognizes white supremacy and anti-Blackness as a social construct that are used to inflict violence on our trans and queer people of color at institutional and interpersonal levels. The school-to-prison pipeline (STPP) is an example of how racialized violence in schools disproportionately harms young people of color. The STPP is a system of policies and practices used by school districts—zero tolerance discipline, policing and surveillance in schools, suspension and expulsion for willful defiance—that push youth of color, queer youth, undocumented youth, lower income youth, and visibly and non-visibly disabled youth out of schools and into the juvenile justice system.

GSA racial justice work is dedicated to dismantling racist structures that push our young people out of schools, to ensure they can instead remain in school, graduate, and be able to pursue their dreams and passions. GSA clubs can use this framework to ensure the work they lead on campus is inclusive of students of color and their experiences.

TAKE ACTION FOR RACIAL JUSTICE YEAR-ROUND

- **Invite a speaker** to discuss racial justice at a meeting
- **Hold an event** with allied campus organizations (e.g. *Black-led student group* or *NAACP youth chapter*)
- **Participate in campaigns** by national racial justice organizations (e.g. *Movement for Black Lives* or *Dignity in Schools*)
- **Raise awareness and funds for trans and queer youth** impacted by racial injustice (e.g. *publicizing campaigns to free students who have been unjustly targeted by the school-to-prison pipeline*)

GENDER JUSTICE

Our principles of gender justice are rooted in self-determination. In our National Trans Youth Council's Nine-Point Platform, they opened with this demand: We call for the right to self-determination and control of our destinies. The right to self-determination is critical to gender justice in that we believe youth of any gender should feel safe and supported in living as their authentic selves.

The patriarchy, which most of our society is modeled after, clearly outlines the prescribed definition of gender and its resulting impacts. The gender binary (man on one side and woman on the other, with little wiggle room) has been used to limit us when it comes to our gender assigned at birth, as well as our gender identity and presentation as we grow up. When young people cross these invisible lines, they are often punished and experience violence.

GSA gender justice work is working toward ending the expectations and limitations put on young people to conform to gender roles assigned to them. To do this, our work centers trans and nonbinary youth as leaders and experts in what a gender liberated future looks like.

TAKE ACTION FOR GENDER JUSTICE YEAR-ROUND

Your GSA club can take action for gender justice year-round. Here are a few ways your club can make gender justice a priority, today and always.

- **Invite a speaker** to discuss gender justice and trans liberation at a meeting
- **Hold an event** with allied campus organizations (e.g. a girls and women's group or sports team)
- **Participate in campaigns** by national gender justice organizations (e.g. *Transgender Law Center* or our own *National Trans Youth Council*)
- **Raise awareness and funds for LGBTQ+ youth** impacted by gender injustice (e.g. *publicizing GoFundMe's for trans folks facing violence*)

#GSADay4GJ

Led by leaders on our National Trans Youth Council, GSA Day for Gender Justice is an annual call to action for GSA clubs to organize in support of trans and nonbinary students and justice.

In 2018, the National Trans Youth Council published a nine point plan to guide our collective vision for gender justice and liberation. The plan is rooted in our history - taking inspiration from the Black Panther Party's Ten-Point Program, the Young Lord's 12 Point Program and Platform, and the Third World Gay Revolution. Learn more at GSA Network's [GSA Day 4 GJ](#).

Join us every November as we organize for gender justice led by the nine-point platform! You can find more information on the next GSA Day for Gender Justice on the GSA Network website leading up to the day of action.



GETTING STARTED WITH YOUR GSA

GSA clubs are primarily school-based clubs where trans and queer students find support, organize for justice, and build community. The clubs can be set up like any other student group, with a faculty advisor and regular meetings. We encourage GSAs to be set up to match particular student needs, which can include the option of setting up a support-based, social-based, and/or activist-based GSA.

GSA BASICS

Everyone is welcome—lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, nonbinary, queer, intersex, asexual, questioning students, and allies, including students who identify as straight, students with LGBTQ+ families, and students who don't have or need a label for their gender identity or sexual orientation.

IDENTIFY YOUR GSA MISSION AND GOALS

Begin by determining the goals your student leaders have for creating this space. This will help guide your club's plans and activities. Consider what type of GSA club you plan to have and how it will work to serve your student community.

You should work with student club leaders to address the nature of your club and its goals in an official mission statement. To develop a vision and values statement, check out our [Values for Justice Workshop](#) and [Visions for Justice in Schools Workshop](#).

SELECT THE TYPE OF GSA

There are three common types of GSAs, with two ways to structure it—based in the school or in the community. Here we focus on school-based clubs; see the section below for information on community-based GSAs.

The three typical functions of a GSA club are to: support students, build community, and create change. We break this down into three types of GSA clubs: Support, Social, and Activist. Most GSAs are a combination of all three.

Support GSAs are for youth who want to have a safe space. These GSAs can be a support group to provide safety and confidentiality to students who are struggling with their identities or those who are experiencing harassment at school because of their actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity or expression. This type of GSA often provides one of the few safe spaces for students to express themselves.

"SOMETIMES WE ARE ACTIVELY ENGAGED IN A POLITICAL CAMPAIGN, OTHER DAYS, WE JUST WANT TO HANG OUT AND WATCH DRAG RACE."

Emily Grijalva, M.Ed & M.S., Restorative Justice Coordinator/Community School Coordinator, Mendez High School



Youth leaders taking a moment of rest and getting ready for another day of growing and learning at activist camp.

Social GSAs are generally helpful for youth trying to meet other trans and queer students and make friends. These GSAs are social groups. They provide a sense of community and a space for LGBTQ+ and their allies to build a social network where their identity is respected. Social GSAs often host cook-outs, movie nights, field trips to a local queer prom or a pride parade, and attend conferences. These GSAs help build community and help students feel less isolated.

Activist GSAs are for youth actively working to improve their school and community climate, and fighting for equity and justice. These GSAs focus on educating students, teachers, parents, and community members to create safer, more accepting schools and communities for trans and queer students. They may seek to change school rules and policies, train staff and students, and help to stop harassment and discrimination. Activist GSAs may organize around state or national campaigns. No matter the type of GSA you and your club select, we anticipate your club's activities may change over time to meet student needs.

COMMUNITY GSA

Over the past decade, we've seen the need grow for community-based GSAs that may carry out support, social, or activist activities, but not be directly affiliated with or recognized by a school nor have a campus advisor. This is an important option particularly for trans and queer youth of color who may face greater challenges to being open about their gender or sexuality at school.

Community GSAs carry out the same activities as school-based GSAs and can access support and resources from the national GSA Network, community partners, and/or other supportive adults. If you come across a community GSA in your area, this could be an opportunity to connect your school-based work with youth outside of campus.

RESEARCH THE LAW

Sometimes school administration can be unsupportive of GSA clubs being established, but the law is on your side. Under the federal Equal Access Act (EAA) of 1984, any school that permits non-curriculum related student groups must provide equal access to all student groups, and that includes equal access for GSAs. Be sure to research your federal and state legislation for starting non-curricular clubs and regarding anti-discrimination. If you encounter any resistance while building your GSA, knowing your legal rights to start a GSA and talk about trans and queer issues in school can go a long way to helping you succeed. [Find a GSA Network partner in your state](#) or local ACLU if you have questions or need support. Remember that students have the right to form a GSA!

FOLLOW GUIDELINES

Starting a GSA is just like starting any other school club. Partner with students to get a copy of your student handbook, and look up your school's requirements for student organizations so that you can be sure to follow the rules carefully. If your school doesn't have easy access to a student handbook, be sure to check in with your Activities Director or Associated Student Body Advisor about the rules for starting a club. As an advisor, you can support students to write a constitution or mission statement. Be sure you and your students do everything required according to the school's rules to avoid slowing down the approval process.

PREPARE AND TURN IN ANY NECESSARY PAPERWORK

Make sure you and your students follow the rules thoroughly and correctly. When you're getting started is the best time to address any potential concerns or arguments from an administrator or a parent.

Some tips as you prepare any paperwork or applications to start your group:

- **Keep dated and signed copies of any forms** or other paperwork turned in for your club application.
- **Keep notes** regarding when you turned paperwork in, and to whom, as well as any conversations you have with school officials about starting the club.
- **Keep record of all documentation** that has been returned to you. This should include responses from administration in writing that have been signed by an administrator.

INFORM ADMINISTRATION OF YOUR PLANS

It may be helpful to tell administrators what you are working on and including GSA student leaders in that process. It can be very helpful to have an administrator on your side. They can work as liaisons on your behalf with other teachers, parent groups, community members, and the school board. If an administrator is resistant to the GSA, let them know that forming a GSA club is protected under the [Federal Equal Access Act](#).



Youth leaders building the relationships that will lead to community and power.

ROLE OF THE GSA ADVISOR

We're about empowering young people, especially trans and queer youth of color, to lead. This means supporting young people to lead GSAs and cheering them on from the sidelines when they are ready to lead. While we recommend every GSA club have a faculty advisor, we encourage advisors to support students in determining the type of GSA, facilitate and lead meetings, set the agenda, draft plans and activities for the year, and make decisions around campaigns, partnerships, and community building.

The GSA advisor is typically a school faculty member who supports starting, running, and maintaining a GSA club. For community-based GSAs, the advisor may be a supportive adult from the community who can help with records and administrative work. Your level of involvement as an advisor will vary, so staying flexible and adaptive will help you stay connected with the student work.

The advisor may help facilitate discussions where the students talk about what they're interested in working on and what student needs must be met by the school. Advisors can support young people to explore potential campus-wide changes that will support trans and queer students now and in the future.

As the advisor, you will be one of the most constant and stable parts of your GSA. Help the current students think, plan, and act not just for this school year or the next, but also for many years down the road. Working for social justice in our schools takes time and we need strong, well-led and well-organized GSAs to lead this movement. You can help your students build for the future by raising funds for next year, creating strong structures in the club that will ensure consistent and good student leadership, and creating an archive of GSA records, events, campaigns, and stories so that future leaders have access to the history of your club.

GSA ADVISOR GENERAL ROLES

Roles can include - but are not limited to - the following:

- **Provide regular opportunities** for skill building, leadership, and learning.
- **Teach students** how to navigate the ins and outs of

your school system in terms of laws and policies, and serve as a liaison between faculty and the GSA.

- **Train students** to resolve conflict among officers and within the club if it arises.
- **Support students in fostering a safe environment** for all students to participate, including challenging any language and behavior from within the GSA that may perpetuate discrimination.
- **Assist students** in managing club funds.
- **Educate and support students** to keep records of meetings and decisions and only if need be, keeping records for the GSA.
- **Set students up to succeed**, but allow for little failures as teachable moments that are followed with conversations that help students to reflect and learn.
- **Support changes within the GSA**, which may include shifting goals or the mission of the group or being more than one “type” of GSA.

ADVISOR ROLES SPECIFIC TO A SUPPORT GSA

A Support GSA works to create a non-judgmental, safe, and nurturing place where students can share their experiences, learn about resources in their school and off campus, connect with others like them, and build peer support. Support GSAs do activities like: movie night, icebreaker activities, board games, trust exercises, sharing circles, arts & crafts, etc. Remember that it is up to the students to decide which type(s) of group they will have.

ADVISOR ROLES SPECIFIC TO A SOCIAL GSA

A Social GSA primarily works to create a fun, safe, and welcoming place where students can make friends, connect with others like them, and build peer support. Remember that it is up to the students to decide which type(s) of group they will have.

ADVISOR ROLES SPECIFIC TO AN ACTIVIST GSA

An Activist GSA primarily works to transform their school into a safe and welcoming environment free of harassment and discrimination against LGBTQ+ and ally people. Activist GSAs help educate students, staff, and parents

on the issues facing the LGBTQ+ and Ally communities, change school policies and practices to end harassment and discrimination, and train students and staff on how to be allies. Activist GSAs connect with resources on and off campus to increase the tools and support they have to change their school. Remember that it is up to the students to decide which type(s) of group they will have.

THE ROLE OF OTHER SUPPORTIVE ADULTS

The most successful GSAs see involvement from a range of other adults from the school and community. This includes peer teachers who may support GSAs through lending their classrooms for meetings, fundraising, or spreading the word; principals and administrators who guarantee the longevity of GSAs and take time to listen to LGBTQ+ youth demands; parents and caregivers who may get involved in planning or chaperoning events; and community partners who support GSA clubs with education, awareness raising, and activism.

Community partners are an increasingly important part of GSA club activities. They can be invited in to speak on various topics (e.g. faith and LGBTQ+ activism), to support your club's organizing campaigns (e.g. a local civil rights group), or to offer jobs and internships to your students (e.g. a local LGBTQ+ youth-serving organization). When you invite community partners to speak at your school, be aware of protocols and procedures for having outside visitors (e.g. sign-in procedures, what topics speakers are allowed to cover, need for admin permission, etc).



Circles are used in workshop to build a space of trust and to make sure everyone is seen, heard, and valued.

'If the space doesn't make us feel safe, it shouldn't be there in the first place.'

Ky Claude laughs and says their entire high school is like one big GSA club. They attend a liberal high school in Columbus, Ohio, where many teachers are openly part of the LGBTQ+ community. While this means LGBTQ+ youth are more likely to access support, trans and queer youth of color face barriers to having their needs met or addressed.

"We've been pushing our administration to become more inclusive of Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and other people of color," says Ky, who is a member of GSA's TRUTH Council. "A teacher who said the N-word wasn't fired and there have been other incidents, too. You can't say you're an inclusive school when young people are telling you, I don't feel safe here."

To help raise awareness about racial injustice and how it intersects with LGBTQ+ discrimination, Ky led their school's participation in the GSA Day of Action for Racial Justice. They spread the word through social media along with holding 1:1 conversations with their school administration. They raised money to fund these activities and ensure their principal and administration paid attention.

"If the space doesn't make us feel safe, it shouldn't be there in the first place," says Ky. "That's what happens when you don't feel like everybody is included or fitting in."

Ky found GSA Network when they turned to their community to access belonging and resources they couldn't get at their school. "I joined Kaleidoscope Youth Center, and got introduced to GSA. They came to Ohio and I met people from the National Youth Council and got to know their work, especially for gender justice and racial justice.

They continue, "It's beautiful when new people show up at a GSA club and feel supported. I've seen GSAs work in a very collaborative way to make the curriculum focus on racial justice and gender justice, rather than just chill and eat snacks. Young people find their voice through that. Even in one lunch period, having the space to unwind, be yourself, and be supported, can do so much for a student."

Ky recognizes different GSA clubs will face different obstacles. They "encourage students to talk to their administration, or else find a group of adults or other people with authority who will back you up. I had a lesbian counselor and lesbian math teacher who were part of my support system. We may have to act as our own support system sometimes, but it's important to reach out to others in your school or community to get that support, too."

Ky sees the uprising in defense of Black lives creating space for visionary conversations about race and gender. "We're talking about abolition of systems of punishment and incarceration and replacing it with transformative justice. There's space to imagine how things could be. At the TRUTH Council, we're uplifting our nine-point platform, particularly the point focused on abolition. My ancestors fought the same fight -- because of the community that TRUTH brings, I know I'm in this fight with leaders who have become like family to me. It's really fulfilling." **Ky Claude, National Trans Youth Council**

GSA Youth Rally to Pass LGBTQ+ Resolution in LA Schools

At GSA Network, we believe every trans and queer youth has the right to a quality education that meets their needs. In June 2019, the LAUSD school board unanimously passed a resolution affirming this right to LGBTQ+ inclusive education.

Titled 'All Means All: Enhancing Supports and Resources for Our LGBTQ+ Students,' the resolution calls on LAUSD to take measures to promote and guarantee LGBTQ+ inclusion including: recognizing October as LGBTQ+ History Month along with other key dates of importance to the LGBTQ+ community; increasing competency trainings for teachers, staff, and parents; sharing LGBTQ+ resources and information on LAUSD's website; and conducting surveys and analysis to ensure all-gender bathrooms are safe and accessible across the district.

The resolution also mandates a high school textbook committee to work with the Division of Instruction and include students in the selection process for appropriate and inclusive textbooks, particularly for history and social science courses.

Students from LAUSD, including GSA club members along with the LA LGBT Center, Latino Equality Alliance, GSA Network staff, and ONE Archives mobilized for months to support the school Board resolution. The Latino Equality Alliance's LGBTQIA Youth Council helped develop the resolution. LEA is a core partner of GSA clubs across LAUSD, including at Mendez High School in Boyle Heights.

Emily Grijalva is a Restorative Justice Coordinator and Community School Coordinator at Mendez H.S. who was asked by her students to become their GSA advisor. She supported students in their efforts to pass the LGBTQ+ resolution, noting that despite policies such as the FAIR Education Act, "Not once have we been encouraged to include LGBT writers or history in our curriculum."

Youth leader Axel Tirado worked to pass the resolution, mobilizing students and working with LEA's youth council. "The bullying is a consequence of a lack of education," they reflected. "Learning queer history validates you."



Los Angeles Unified School District students in action for safer schools.



Leaders taking up space and offering knowledge to end the S2PP.



Youth leaders making it clear: Black Trans Lives Matter.

RUNNING AND SUSTAINING YOUR GSA

DAY TO DAY

Once you have established your club's purpose and type (e.g. support, social, or activist) and become officially recognized by the school, you can begin holding meetings and determining your day to day club activities.

Advisor and Student Note: Many of the day to day activities and guidelines described in this section will be carried out by student club leaders, not necessarily by you, the advisor. Work with students to find the balance that feels good for your campus.

PREPARE FOR MEETINGS

- **Set the agenda:** Make a list of issues or topics to discuss at each meeting.
- **Publicize the meetings:** Figure out the best ways to reach as many people as possible at school (e.g. daily announcements, flyers, posters, social media).

Tip: Fun incentives like snacks or trinkets can be great for publicizing.

RUN A GOOD MEETING

- **Set community agreements:** To make sure the group members feel safe and heard, establish community agreements and try to keep students mindful of them.
- **Decision-making:** Figure out how your group will make decisions like majority vote or consensus.
- **Identify a facilitator:** Designate someone to keep the group focused on the meeting agenda.
- **Take notes or minutes** at each meeting for members who couldn't attend.
- **Use Facebook groups, Google docs, or email** to share notes. Figure out what works best for your club.

CREATE AN ACTION PLAN

- **Have a brainstorming session:** Set your ideas into a list of priorities and concentrate on the top three.
- **Set up committees:** Make each project a committee and appoint a leader to organize the specific project. Committees help spread leadership.
- **Set tentative dates:** Put deadlines, dates of meetings, or anything else into official school calendars. Follow a schedule and take your deadlines seriously.

SUBCOMMITTEE 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.

HOW TO FACILITATE A MEETING

This will be helpful information to share with student leaders.

WHAT IS A FACILITATOR?

The facilitator is the person who runs a meeting and moves the meeting along. Facilitators make sure participants can share their opinions and stories, discuss topics, and make decisions.

The facilitator is responsible for:

- **Making sure members agree** on the agenda before and during the meeting.
- **Ensuring the group keeps** to ground rules/community agreements.

Building Power through GSAs

"I joined my school's GSA during my freshman year. I remember we had an ally day, and I said, a day isn't long enough -- we need a whole week."

Princess Arthur is a GSA National Youth Council member from the Inland Empire who has been active with GSA throughout high school. Her advocacy to expand the ally event from a day to a week was only the beginning. She saw that not all LGBTQ+ youth at her school were able to access the healthcare or mental health support they needed. With her GSA, Princess conducted surveys of other students to find out whether the healthcare they accessed was inclusive or comprehensive.

The club applied the guidelines from the [2016 California Healthy Youth Act](#) that requires school districts to provide students with comprehensive and unbiased sexual health and HIV prevention education in middle school and high school. From the feedback they received, Princess and the GSA talked to their administration about making the school's health curriculum more inclusive. They were able to secure their principal's support, though the pandemic interrupted their implementation plans.

"It's important for people to see themselves in curriculum," says Princess. "I cannot stress enough the importance of inclusive health - we have to promote health for all or it's health for no one."

Princess Arthur, Inland Empire GSA club

- **Guiding the discussion**, intervening if problems arise.
- **Staying neutral, asking questions**, and suggesting ways to approach agenda items.
- **Keeping the group on track and on schedule**, particularly when the group goes on a tangent.
- **Making sure the group comes to decisions**, and dividing work clearly among members.
- **Maintaining awareness** of the energy level in the room and helping encourage members.
- **Making sure everyone participates**, no one dominates.
- **Creating a safe, positive, and comfortable environment** (protecting people from personal attack).

STRATEGIES FOR RUNNING A GOOD MEETING

- **Checking in** and asking GSA members if there is anything they want to add to each meeting's agenda

for the GSA to discuss.

Ex: "Are there any topics you all would like to add to the agenda?" (During the beginning of the meeting, possibly after reviewing the agenda for the meeting.)

- **If someone puts an item on the agenda**, ask them to briefly cover important background information and what they want done.

Ex: "Jordan, could you please share a little background information on this topic and what you'd like the GSA to do about it or how you want us to address it?"
- **Give 5 minute warnings** when moving on to another agenda item. Have another member be a timekeeper if necessary. If time runs out, ask the group to agree to spend more time on the issue, postpone it until later in the meeting, or put the discussion off until another meeting.

Ex: "We are out of time for this topic and still have some other topics to talk about. Do folks want to make a



Workshop leaders being creative and keeping youth leader attention through storytelling and building connection among participants.

decision on this now in the next 10 minutes, or do you all want to talk about it more next meeting?"

- **If a comment, question, or topic is off-topic** at the moment, create a list (a parking lot or bike rack) for items to be discussed at another time.

STRATEGIES FOR ENCOURAGING PARTICIPATION

- **Encourage full participation:** make sure everyone gets to speak.

Ex: "I've noticed a few people have been saying a lot on this topic. Is there anyone who hasn't spoken yet who wants to say something?"

- **Try to notice** when someone is holding back. Try different ways of discussing topics if you think it will help, like a "Go Around" or "Pair Share."

Ex: "Some people may not want to talk openly about this topic. But it's important we hear all different points of view, so I encourage everyone to be honest about their feelings, if you feel safe."

- **Keep track** of the list of people who want to speak, and share it out loud so everyone knows the speaking order. Feel free to put people who have not yet spoken, first in the list.

Ex: "Okay, let's have Aleja, Travis, Sanjay, Tran, and then Em for the speaking order."

STRATEGIES FOR FACILITATING DISCUSSION AND DECISION MAKING

- **Help people avoid repeating themselves** by summarizing discussion and asking only for comments in areas that haven't been mentioned.

Ex: "Are there any different arguments against or in favor that haven't been mentioned yet?"

- **If the group has been discussing a topic for a while,** move the group towards a decision or agreement.

Ex: "It seems like most people agree that we should talk to the Dean about the harassment that is going on."

- **Know when the group has reached a decision.** Also know when a group cannot reach a decision; suggest postponing a decision when the group needs critical information, the group needs to hear from others, or the group is not prepared.

- **Check briefly** for agreement before moving on – make sure everyone understands decisions.

- **It's best if the facilitator can remain as neutral as possible,** so they do not abuse their power. If the facilitator wants to participate actively in the discussion, they can ask someone else to take over facilitation. If the facilitator has a comment to add, they should say so and add themselves to the speakers list, and not simply speak and take advantage of being the facilitator.

Ex: "Speaking as a GSA member, I think..."

Ex: "Okay, I want to make a comment as well, after Darren..."

FUNDRAISING

Your GSA club is making important changes on your school campus, but you and your students may require funds to keep up the momentum. Here we share ideas to help your club figure out what works best, your fundraising goals, and the individual strengths of your members.

BEFORE YOU GET STARTED

Find out your school's fundraising policy for clubs. Potentially have a student club leader talk with Student Government and invite them to a GSA meeting so they can explain the fundraising policy and process to all GSA members. Fundraising policies are different at every school, so be sure you and your students give yourself enough time to get your idea(s) approved.

WHO SHOULD BE RESPONSIBLE FOR FUNDRAISING IN MY GSA CLUB?

Every GSA club member should know how fundraising works, not just the club officers. Some of the tools your students learn when fundraising can also be applied to other areas of youth organizing.

ONCE YOU ARE READY TO RAISE MONEY

Step 1: Brainstorm

With your student club members, brainstorm and decide what you want to raise money for. Is it to host an event or summit, or travel to an event, T-shirts, or something else?

How much will you need? Once you determine the amount that actually needs to be raised, you and your students will be able to choose the right strategy for your goals.

Step 2: Choose the right strategy for your club

There are so many activities that a club can do to raise money, so talk to your student club members about what they enjoy doing and/or what they are good at. Your club's fundraising efforts will be most successful if you choose an activity and strategy that members enjoy.

All fundraising activities essentially fall into three main strategies:

1) **JUST ASK!** Most people enjoy making donations to

causes that they believe in or supporting local schools and activities. You just need to ask! There are several ways to ask people to make a donation to your cause or project:

- **Launch a social media campaign** and link to a crowd-funding website (like GoFundMe) to create awareness and raise funds. Social media can be a powerful tool that members of your GSA may already be experts in. If people in your networks aren't able to give, ask them to share and spread your message far and wide.
- **Create an informational flyer or write a letter** that you can send to people, organizations, and businesses in your local community. Tell them why your cause or project is important and explain how their donation will be used as well as the impact it will have on your GSA club or school.

2) **SELL!** Selling items can be fun for students and send a fun message about your club too. Choose products that are relatively inexpensive to buy and that can be sold at a higher price. Be sure to only buy as much as students will be able to sell, so they are not stuck with unsold inventory. Some popular items among GSA youth leaders are pins, stickers, and baked goods (rainbow cupcakes, anyone?).

3) **HOST AN EVENT!** Is there a particular activity or sport that your club members enjoy? Tailor your event to your members' interests as well as your audiences to ensure success.

Step 3: Thank your supporters!

Be sure the club shows appreciation to the people who give to the cause. Help students to ensure all supporters are thanked, no matter how big or small the size of their donation. Here are some ideas on showing appreciation to supporters:

- **Collect email addresses and send out a Thank You** picture or short video of your GSA club members expressing their gratitude. Briefly tell them what the club will achieve thanks to their support.
- **Share a Thank You picture or short video** via social media with everyone who supported the club's campaign.
- **Make Thank You cards** with handwritten notes. Have

all members or the club officers sign the card.

- **If selling a product**, tie a ribbon with a small thank you tag to the product.
- **Take a group photo** holding a poster that says “Thank you” and use the photo to post a social media thank you to club supporters, friends, and allies.

ADVERTISING

Inevitably, the question comes up: “How do we get more students to come to our GSA club?” Here are ideas to boost attendance and participation; you can brainstorm additional ideas with your students:

- **Provide food** at your meetings
- **Put an announcement** in the daily e-bulletin or other daily communication to students
- **Advertise at club day** - have a table (virtually or in-person) and, funds permitting, pass out fun collectibles like stickers or pins with the name of your GSA
- **Participate in school pride** or spirit week at your school
- **Set up an information table** at lunch or special events in a visible place
- **Reach out to cisgender and straight allies**, peer teachers, and/or community partners who may be interested in engaging
- **Pass out colorful pride ribbons** or GSA buttons to GSA supporters
- **Make flyers or posters** about specific meetings, topics, or events - post around campus and share digitally
- **Ask peer teachers** to permanently post your group’s general flyer in their classroom
- **Send representatives to classes** to make an announcement about your group’s meetings and activities and/or invite student club leaders to make an announcement to your class
- **Create a digital account** where you and student club leaders can post all your information and activities; e.g.

TikTok, Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, website, or other online/social media account

VIRTUAL TOOLS

For a multitude of reasons, virtual meetings may serve your GSA club needs at one time or another. This section will offer tips on how to successfully run GSA activities from our screens.

Advisor and Student Note: Many of the day to day activities and guidelines described in this section will be carried out by student club leaders, not necessarily by you, the advisor. Work with students to find the balance that feels good for your campus.

HOW TO HOST A VIRTUAL GSA MEETING

Getting Started

- **Pick a platform:** Select a digital platform based on the type of GSA meeting you want to host. Club leaders, including advisors, should research platform features and prices before making a decision.
 - Video call: Zoom, Google Hangouts, Google Meet, Skype
 - Group chat: Slack, Discord, Q Chat Space
 - Movie party: Netflix Party, Metastream, Kast, Squad, TwoSeven
 - Game party: Houseparty
- **Choose a meeting date and time.** Encourage members to RSVP.
- **Promote your meeting:** Club leaders should work with their advisors to determine the safest way to contact members. Be discreet and mindful of people’s privacy.
 - When calling youth, it may not be safe to mention “GSA club” or another trans or queer reference. Alternatively, club leaders can say they are from a student leadership program at (insert school name).
 - Do not share meeting or registration details publicly. Send that information directly to GSA members via email, text/phone, or direct messaging online.

SETTING YOUR AGENDA

Once club leaders know what type of meeting they want to have, make a schedule of activities and topics to cover. See Sample Virtual Meeting Agenda below.

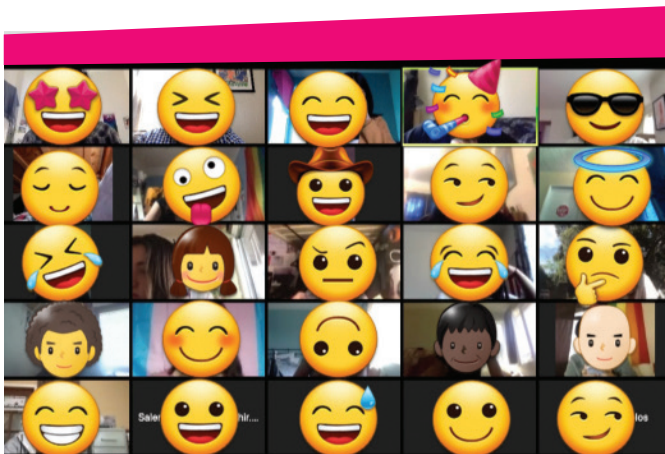
- **Introductions and check-in:** Share names, pronouns, and responses to an icebreaker question.
- **Housekeeping:** Explain how the digital platform works and review community agreements for meetings.
- **Optional wellness activity:** Share a tip or resource to stay grounded and healthy.
- **Political education or group discussion:** Introduce a topic of the day. Lead a workshop or pose a discussion question related to that topic. See sample workshops on our [Virtual GSAs in Action page](#).
- **Closing:** Finish the meeting with club announcements, including the next meeting date and time, ways to stay connected while physical distancing, and additional resources.

RUNNING A GOOD MEETING

Similar to in-person meetings, facilitators should keep the group on schedule and encourage member participation.

- **Get to know the platform:** Prior to meeting day, facilitators should take time to familiarize themselves with the chosen virtual space. Read the platform's instructions and/or find a video tutorial.

- **Day-of setup:** Facilitators should spend 15-30 minutes before the meeting to make sure the digital space is ready for members. If there are special features (*chatboxes, polls, breakout rooms*), they can practice using them).
- **Make space:** Ask members if there is an item they want to add to the agenda.
- **Stick to the community agreements:** Make sure that members follow your GSA's agreements.
- **Keep the energy up:** Be aware of the energy level and make adjustments to the agenda as needed.
- **Center community care:** Members may be overloaded with stress, fear, dysphoria, and anxiety during this time. Be prepared for them to bring their feelings to the virtual space.
 - **Before the meeting,** it's important for facilitators' to check in with themselves and make sure they are in the mindset to hold these types of spaces. Support them to recognize their boundaries and what they are able to help with.
 - **If someone feels comfortable sharing,** listen respectfully. If they need additional support, feel free to contact GSA Network for resources. Please refrain from giving members advice. You would not want to put a friend in jeopardy.



Making the best of zoom calls can sometimes look pretty silly, but is always worth it.



Youth leaders share knowledge and actively listen to their workshop partners.

SAMPLE IN-PERSON OR VIRTUAL MEETING AGENDA

1. CHECK-IN (5-10 MINUTES)

Share your name, pronouns, and your quarantine nickname (your mood + the last thing you ate).

2. OPTIONAL ICE BREAKER (10 MINUTES): ANIMAL SHOWDOWN

Make sure players have their videos on and set to a view mode to see everyone. Choose a starting ringleader from the group. Name 4 animals (ex. bunny, dragon, bear, snake) and match them with different hand signals. On the count of 3, players reveal their animal sign. If players choose the same animal sign as the ringleader, they are eliminated. The ringleader role can rotate from person to person.

3. HOUSEKEEPING (10 MINUTES)

Briefly explain the main features of the digital platform (ex. how to turn the microphone or video on and off, breakout rooms, etc.)

Review your club's ground rules and community agreements (ex. What's said here stays here, what's learned here leaves here.)

4. OPTIONAL WELLNESS ACTIVITY (5-10 MINUTES)

Play a funny YouTube video or a song that you have on repeat.

Lead a quick group stretch.

5. POLITICAL EDUCATION OR GROUP DISCUSSION (20 MINUTES): CLIMATE JUSTICE

Introduction: Show a video of a youth-led climate strike.

Discussion questions: What have you seen or heard about young people fighting for the environment? What do you think climate activism can learn from trans and queer communities?

Resource: [Climate Justice & Queer & Trans Liberation \(podcast\)](#)

Resource: [Why Indigenous Youth Were 2019's Climate Warriors](#)

6. CLOSING (5-10 MINUTES)

In the chat box, share a word for how you're feeling right now or a takeaway from the conversations you had.

The next meeting will be next Wednesday at 4pm.

What recommendations do you have for future discussion topics or activities? What did you like or dislike about this digital platform?

ADDITIONAL VIRTUAL GSA TOOLS CAN BE [FOUND HERE](#)

YOUTH LEADERSHIP

As the school year comes to an end, many GSA leaders worry about what will happen to the GSA club once they promote or graduate. Let's plan proactively!

TRANSITIONING LEADERSHIP

It is important to create a strategy for passing the torch of leadership so that your GSA stays strong for many years. Your long-term goal is to keep your GSA active in the fight against anti-trans and anti-queer violence in schools. An effective student club needs strong leadership every year. So, regardless of your club's leadership structure (such as officers, senators, executive committee, etc.), you will have a short-term goal every year of finding a reliable and passionate group of individuals to lead the club. Then, you will need to develop a strategy that looks at the situation within your GSA club and at your school, and plan how to best train new leaders.

IDENTIFY YOUR RESOURCES

What are your strengths? Your challenges? Who is currently involved? How many graduating seniors currently lead the GSA? What about younger students in lower grades? Do you have an engaged base?

IDENTIFY YOUR POTENTIAL LEADERS

Look around your GSA meetings. Think about the participants in your events this year, such as Day of Silence. Are there students who will be at school next year who are interested in a GSA leadership role? Maybe there are students in the GSA who would make great leaders, with some coaching and training, but they feel unsure or unaware of their own leadership potential. Remember that EVERY new member can potentially become a leader of your GSA!

Some ways you can support building student leadership include:

- **Training new members** in the rules, history, and projects of your GSA.
- **Spreading out responsibility** to all members throughout the school year, not just at the end.
- **Taking turns facilitating meetings** so everyone knows what it feels like to be up front and prepare you for a possible leadership role.
- **Specifically asking younger GSA members** to facilitate meetings throughout the year.
- **Networking** with other organizations on & off campus.

SELECT YOUR NEW LEADERS EARLY

Many GSA clubs select their new leadership in the middle of each school year, rather than at the beginning. The advantage of holding elections at the beginning of Spring semester is that your new leaders can be trained and mentored by your outgoing leaders.

TRAIN YOUR LEADERS

Develop a mechanism for your outgoing leaders to train your incoming leaders. Here are some tips:

- **Have summer outings** to continue the GSA momentum and build connections.
- **Have leadership trainings** where all resources will be transferred (club constitution, summary of past events).

YOUTH-ADULT PARTNERSHIP

Students working with their GSA advisor, other supportive adults at the school, and/or adult community partners will be a core part of the relationships they will build when you run a successful GSA. Here are some things to consider for adults and youth working together.

PRIOR TO STARTING

- Challenge your stereotypes about youth and/or adults.
- Clearly define roles, responsibilities, and expectations for youth and adults.
- Ensure that one group does not greatly outnumber the other.

BUILD EFFECTIVE YOUTH ADULT PARTNERSHIPS

- **Evaluate the structure of the organization:** Did youth or adults start the group? Who leads the group? Have both youth and adults always participated?
- **Prioritize youth leadership and facilitation** and focus on leadership training and skill-building for students.
- **Follow a specific process** for planning events and projects in your GSA. Make sure responsibilities are clearly designated and expectations are well defined.
- **Frequently evaluate group dynamics:** Do adult advisors and student leaders both feel supported? Do youth members feel they have the power and control in the group?
- **If adults tend to outnumber youth** or dominate the GSA, consider forming a separate Genders & Sexualities Teacher's Alliance or faculty group.
- **If adult advisors wish to be involved** in setting meeting agendas (or are required to by school policy), make sure that a youth leader is also involved in the process.
- **If adult advisors have concerns** about a particular project, have them voice these by asking questions instead of handing down authoritative decisions.



Youth leaders take center stage when there is an opportunity for young voices to shine.

YOUTH AND ADULT PARTNERSHIP TIPS

- **ASK QUESTIONS-** Conflict can easily arise when messages are misconstrued. Communication styles vary from person to person; different communication styles do not imply disrespect or disinterest. Ask questions in order to clarify and keep a common goal in mind to help address conflicts.
- **BE DELIBERATE-** Adults and young people vary widely on content knowledge, development, and willingness to participate. Create a way to hold everyone accountable in the work they do.
- **BE RESPECTFUL-** Everyone comes from different backgrounds and experiences. It is important to respect and recognize what an individual brings to the group.
- **YOUTH TRAINING-** Create learning opportunities for youth to take leadership on important projects. Facilitate growth for young people in a meaningful way such as public speaking, communication, and assertive skills.

Starting a GSA Club with Adult and Community Support

"I'm a community kid," says Curly Dynamite, a queer youth leader from southern California who identifies as nonbinary. Curly found out about GSAs from a mentor, while they were figuring out their gender and sexuality in high school. Curly saw how LGBTQ+ people in their school and neighborhood experienced harassment and discrimination. They got in touch with GSA staff to access resources and support to start a GSA club at their school to create community among LGBTQ+ youth, particularly trans and queer youth of color.

Curly worked with other students to organize and promote GSA club activities including educational as well as community events like a successful Rainbow Extravaganza event with music and art. They applied for a grant with the support of a teacher which helped them afford t-shirts to promote belonging while also raising the club's profile around campus. Their advisor offered them a regular room for their meetings, and they were able to grow to 30 members, with 16 students becoming active members. Their principal also supported their club, particularly when other teachers pushed back against the club.

"We need to learn for ourselves who we are," says Curly. "We need to learn LGBTQ+ history in this country, learn our history in other countries. Even if we're immigrants or the child of immigrants, this history still matters and impacts us."

Curly Dynamite, LAUSD GSA club

GETTING INVOLVED

GSA clubs build power for a growing movement of trans and queer youth and we actively support youth through training in leadership, organizing, and advocacy for racial and gender justice. At GSA Network, we empower trans and queer youth to educate their schools and communities, organize in coalition with other youth across identity lines, and advocate for just policies that protect all youth from harassment and violence. In addition to offering support to young people for the work they lead on their campus, we also invite youth leaders to take advantage of various opportunities we offer through our own staff programming.

GET TRAINED

- **Leadership Trainings & Summits:** Day-long trainings teach the basics of community organizing, school-based campaign strategy, and student rights advocacy.
- **Activist Camps:** Intensive 3-day summer camps provide deeper training on racial and gender justice, students' legal rights, gender identity activism, and curriculum inclusion advocacy, among other topics.
- **Conferences:** Day-long conferences include a series of workshops focused on local organizing and skill-building to start GSA clubs, civic engagement and activism, sexual health and healthy relationships, and teaching students about their education rights. Adult tracks are offered at select conferences.

BECOME A GSA LEADER

- **Youth councils:** Build your GSA activism, help guide GSA Network's youth organizing campaign strategy, and become a youth trainer. Apply to one of our [Regional California](#) or [National Youth Councils](#).
- **National Trans Youth (TRUTH) Council:** Our TRUTH Council was created with public education at its core, intending to challenge the pre-existing narratives media had of trans youth, and work with communities to push for a shift. TRUTH is a place where young people can connect with other trans youth and find inspiration in their stories, and also find resources and support in

thinking through their goals as a storyteller, how to stay safe when sharing their story publicly, and how to share their story authentically and effectively for their goals. Learn more about their work at ourtranstruth.org.

- **Queering Brotherhood Fellowship:** Provides leadership training and development to up to 20 GBT boys and men of color through our work with [Brothers, Sons, Selves Coalition \(BSS\)](#).

BUILD THE GSA MOVEMENT

GSA Network is accelerating the growth of a national youth-led GSA movement. We strengthen the ability of trans and queer youth of color to envision and create sustainable communities where they can live authentically, and we support community-based organizations across the country that are making a local impact.

LOCAL STRATEGY, NATIONAL IMPACT

GSA Network seeks to strengthen national movement-building capacity at the intersection of LGBTQ+ youth organizing and racial and gender justice to end school push-out, and develop the next generation of LGBTQ+ leaders, particularly low-income youth and youth of color, in those regions of the country where youth face the greatest isolation and the least amount of access to resources: the Southeast and Midwest.

GSA Network Southeast was launched in 2014 followed by GSA Network Midwest in 2017. We also operate GSA Network of California. Through our Regional Organizing strategy, we infuse staff capacity and technical expertise in these regions in order to strengthen local organizations and increase trans and queer youth of color leadership development and engagement. Each regional office is staffed with dedicated Organizers from the regions to provide youth leadership training, capacity-building, and technical assistance, as well as support youth in carrying out national organizing campaigns.

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF GSA NETWORKS

Launched in 2005, the National Association of GSA Networks is a group of state organizations that represent at least 3,500 GSA clubs across the country that work together to align our national and regional organizing strategy for racial and gender justice. The goals of the

National Program are to:

- **Convene the National Association** of GSA Networks to accelerate the growth and impact of the GSA movement nationwide.
- **Provide training and technical assistance** to state and regional networks of GSA clubs across the U.S.
- **Create a GSA network in every state** by replicating GSA Network's successful youth leadership and GSA organizing model.

"WHEN I WENT TO THE GSA YOUTH COUNCIL ACTIVIST CAMP, IT WAS AMAZING BEING AROUND OTHER YOUTH WHO EMBRACED WHO THEY WERE -- I COULD FEEL THE POWER IN THE ROOM. IF THEY COULD DO THIS FOR ME, I WANTED TO BE ABLE TO DO THIS FOR SOMEONE ELSE."

*Princess Arthur
Inland Empire GSA Club*

There are currently 20 states represented in the National Association of GSA Networks. Each organization has made a commitment to work towards more youth leadership, deeper analysis, and strategy to address white supremacy, and create adequate support systems to address gender justice. We work with local partners to develop new curriculum, programs, and models that better fit the various communities our local partner organizations work with. Association members are now intentionally working with trans and queer youth of color, bringing an intersectional lens to their existing programming with LGBTQ+ youth. Members are invited to participate in National Gathering, an annual convening of the National Association of GSA Networks, to share skills, strategize, and train organizers from member organizations and youth on various topics that impact our schools and communities.

STRENGTHENING THE FOUNDATION OF YOUR GSA

In this section we offer resources for ensuring your GSA club has a strong foundation that can be sustained for years to come. The road to trans and queer liberation can be a difficult one, and people may have questions about GSA's purpose or in some cases be unsupportive of trans and queer youth. We hope these resources can support your club as well as your role in being an adult ally champion.

TALKING POINTS TO PARENTS, CAREGIVERS, AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS ABOUT GSA

- Anticipate concerns, questions, and possible resistance.
- Be prepared to educate about what a GSA is and does (refer to "GSA Basics" section of handbook), and to address potential misconceptions that they might have about GSAs.
- Emphasize the skills and abilities that GSA membership can help to foster in its members: organizing, social justice, facilitating, inter-group dialogue, conflict resolution, interpersonal intelligence, event planning, public speaking, etc.
- Know your school's/district's policies that either implicitly or explicitly support GSAs, and be able to direct parents/guardians/families to more information.
- Know the laws in your state around students' privacy rights and what you do and don't have to tell parents/guardians/families. This is important so you don't inadvertently out a student as a member of the GSA.
- Have parent/guardian/family-specific resources available for GSA members' families in a variety of languages (Family Acceptance project, PFLAG, COLAGE, Somos Familia, etc.). Note that in many cases, it is not required that parents/guardians know that students are part of a GSA.
- Invite supportive families to a GSA meeting or event.



Trans youth leaders showing up and out for national gathering.

Photo removed due to copyright

Youth leaders pose for a quick selfie near an all-gender restroom. Big smiles for safer schools.

TALKING POINTS TO ADMINISTRATORS, TEACHERS, COUNSELORS, AND OTHER STAFF

If you need to talk to administrators or other teachers, keep these tips in mind:

- **Be clear what you're asking for** and make sure that you're asking the right person. For example, you might need to talk to the Student Activities Coordinator regarding an issue with the GSA. It might not be necessary to ask the principal directly for a GSA because activities are not in the principal's purview.
- **Do you have assumptions** about how an administrator, counselor, or teacher will react? Even homophobic or transphobic administrators may want to learn more about trans and queer issues or allow a GSA. They may care about bullying/harassment but do not know a lot about trans and queer issues.
- **Work to find common ground.** Stressing the need to create a safe and accessible school for all students can help create common ground between you and other parties.
- **Bring trans and queer 101 materials with you,** including local resources. Bring a proposed mission statement. Check out our GSA Network resources pages for some possible supporting documents to bring with you.
- **Find adult allies** affiliated with the school and ask them to attend the meeting with you.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Conflict is normal and sometimes inevitable. Which is why it is important to have plans in place to address conflict, rather than avoid it or hope it doesn't arise. The conflict outcome is affected by the way the people involved in the conflict resolve the situation. There is different potential for conflict in GSAs: conflicts between students, between you and students, or between the GSA club and other people inside or outside of your school. Here are some tips to address conflict:

- **Access peer mediation resources** available to you. A lot of schools have peer mediation resources and a counselor trained in this skill.
- **Many schools also offer restorative justice practices** to address and resolve conflict. Determine whether your school has access to restorative practices and/or check out RJ resources [available here](#).

Scenario: *Tiger (GSA President) and Jason (GSA Vice President) have a conflict because of a mutual friend's Facebook post about immigration. They have not been coming to meetings and the GSA has suffered because of their conflict.*

- Ask to meet both students privately at the same time.
- Allow each student to share their side of the conflict. Make sure that each student uses "I" statements and has the opportunity to feel heard.
- Your role as GSA Advisor is to explain their impact on the GSA and other students.
- Help the students find common ground. You can agree to disagree and make sure to value all opinions.
- Bring it back to group agreements and encourage the youth to follow those group agreements.
- Brainstorm solutions and next steps to solve the conflict together. Agree on which next steps the group will follow.

JOB AND LEGAL PROTECTIONS

Whether you're a state or private employee, your protections as a GSA Advisor, staff ally, or as an LGBTQ+ individual might differ from state to state and even from school district to school district. Below are some recommendations for making sure that you are protected:

- **Start with your state's policies.** Does your state offer anti-discrimination protections based on sexual orientation and gender identity for public and/or private employees? Check out your state government's website or check out Lambda Legal's state-by-state guide.
- **Your state might not provide job protections,** but your municipality might. Check your local government's website or contact a city or county official to find out.
- **Check your district's policies.** You should be able to find out about these on the district's website, but you should also check in with your union representative. Find a union representative that you trust, and inquire not just about existing policies, but about any other instances of how your district supports (or doesn't support) GSAs and their advisors. If you don't feel comfortable talking to a local union representative, contact your union's national headquarters.

In many cases, there might not be job protections for actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity. This can be a difficult place to be and we honor your courage to continue to sponsor the GSA club. If you choose to organize in the face of adversity and do not have policies to protect you, you can try to organize in the community or have the club meet outside of school. Build coalitions with other teachers and student groups or try to have multiple advisors. And you may need to step aside and let your students do the bulk of the work.

PROTECTING YOURSELF

Document any noteworthy incident, based on what you observed. A noteworthy incident is one that you think may be important later on; might have significant consequences that affect students, staff, or the school; violates school policy; triggers your mandatory reporting status. Even if you didn't witness the incident, but it was reported to you, document that it was reported to you and by whom.

Your documentation should be as detailed as possible (names, dates, times, places, content), and should be kept in a safe, secure place. If you share the record, be sure to share a copy and keep the original, noting when and with whom you shared it, as well as any follow-up that occurs. Keep in mind that, as a school employee, your records—even anecdotal ones—belong to your employer.

CONFIDENTIALITY BEST PRACTICES

- Never promise blanket confidentiality.
- Let your students know the limits of your confidentiality (based on your mandatory reporting status).
- If you err in a confidentiality-related issue, err on the side of safety.
- Exceptions to confidentiality (when mandatory reporting is triggered) usually include abuse, danger to self, and danger to others.
- Rules and regulations differ from circuit to circuit and state to state, and levels of confidentiality are usually much higher for school counselors, nurses, psychologists, social workers, and home visitors, than for teachers. Find out what the confidentiality rules are for your area and job title.
- If pushed into a corner on a confidentiality issue, make sure that your actions are based on your intent to protect and assist a student, and do not reflect an "intent to harm".
- You may have a "right to know" certain information about a student during the course of your work. Do not share this information with anyone who does not have the same right to know, and be sure that others do not overhear you sharing the information.
- Confidential material can be subpoenaed; make sure your documentation contains only factual, observable information.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

STORYTELLING

Stories are incredibly powerful to help you build community, get the word out about your GSA club, and lift up the leadership of LGBTQ+ youth. Here we share a couple opportunities for storytelling with your GSA club.

ARCHIVING YOUR CLUB'S STORIES

Throughout the year, consider capturing the stories of LGBTQ+ youth participating in your GSA club. Secure the permission of student leaders beforehand, and archive these stories online, potentially in a password-protected Dropbox or Google Drive where only you and student club leaders can access them. Creating an archive like this will allow your club to capture not only the vibrant stories of what your club accomplished throughout the year, but these stories can also be lifted up to show the impact of a club which can be helpful for advertising, fundraising, and organizing and advocacy.

TRUTH: TRANS AND GENDER NON-CONFORMING YOUTH STORYTELLING MOVEMENT

TRUTH, a collaboration between Transgender Law Center and GSA Network, is a national trans and gender nonconforming youth leadership and storytelling program that aims to build empathy, understanding, and a movement for youth to share their stories in their own words and in their own way.

Encourage your students to go to [Our Trans Truth](#) to share their story, find resources, and hear from trans youth across the country.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

WHAT IS GSA NETWORK?

Genders & Sexualities Alliance Network is a next-generation LGBTQ+ racial and gender justice organization that empowers and trains trans, queer, and allied youth leaders to advocate, organize, and mobilize an intersectional movement for safer schools and healthier communities. In California, GSA Network connects over 1,000 GSA clubs through regional summits and youth councils. Nationally, GSA Network leads the National Association of GSA Networks which unites 40 statewide and local networks of GSA clubs. Founded in 1998, Genders & Sexualities Alliance Network (GSA Network) is the only youth driven organization that networks GSA clubs in California, and networks statewide and local organizations serving GSA clubs across the country.

WHO ARE THE MEMBERS OF GSA NETWORK?

Members of GSA Network are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, nonbinary, queer, intersex, and straight ally youth, school personnel, and supportive community members who value and support trans and queer youth leadership coming together for racial and gender justice. Straight cisgender youth are often members of GSAs because they have trans and/or queer family or friends.

CAN MY SCHOOL BLOCK OUR GSA FROM EXISTING?

GSAs cannot be banned if other non-curricular student clubs are allowed to exist at the school. The Federal Equal Access Act and the First Amendment of the US Constitution establish the requirement of equal treatment for all non-curriculum related clubs regardless of the content of speech at the club meetings. That means any school that receives government funding and has at least one other non-curricular club must also allow a GSA.

WHAT IMPACT DO GSAS HAVE ON SCHOOL CLIMATE?

Overwhelming evidence indicates that GSAs improve school climate for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex students, and their allies. GSAs that conduct student and teacher sensitivity trainings typically see a decrease in slurs, name-calling, and harassment following their advocacy efforts. GSAs also create youth-run spaces for students to meet and socialize. The presence of a GSA club on campus is associated with lower levels of youth self-reports of school-based victimization.

HOW DO GSA CLUBS DIFFER IN DIFFERENT GEOGRAPHIC LOCATIONS ACROSS THE U.S.?

Different geographic locations across the U.S. may view and interact with GSA clubs differently. GSAs located in bigger cities with more visible LGBTQ+ populations may have a slightly easier time forming and sustaining their GSAs because the school community may be more comfortable with LGBTQ+ youth being visible and active. But even in those communities, students may encounter challenges with their gender or racial identities.

Students from smaller towns may see less visible representation of their LGBTQ+ identity in their community, but may still find advisors or other supportive adults to form or sustain a GSA club. Whatever community you work in, this Handbook can support you to start, run, and sustain a successful GSA.

HOW DO WE WELCOME PEOPLE OF DIFFERENT FAITH BACKGROUNDS TO FEEL SUPPORTED IN OUR GSAS?

The relationship between faith and LGBTQ+ identity continues to evolve in our schools and communities. Part of your role as an advisor is to talk openly about religion and faith in order to promote a positive and welcoming school climate that surfaces questions and tensions, rather than denying that they exist. Inviting discussion and creating space for it can help break down stereotypes that say students must choose between practicing their faith and identifying as LGBTQ+.

Options for creating dialogue and discussion include:

- Invite faith-based community partners who can speak to the relationship between faith and LGBTQ+ identity

- Watch a movie or read a book that speaks to how faith and LGBTQ+ identity can affirm each other and hold a discussion about the movie or book
- Explore co-hosting events or programming with faith-based groups on campus
- Refer students to affirming places of worship in the community if they express interest in learning more or speaking to a faith-based leader

HOW CAN OUR SCHOOLS SUPPORT LGBTQ+ YOUTH WHO ARE UNDOCUMENTED?

Undocumented TQ youth face a unique set of challenges and required targeted support to ensure they are safe in schools and communities. Organizations like United We Dream can provide access to legal and advocacy resources for undocumented LGBTQ+ youth. See their [LGBTQ Justice program](#). [Undocuqueer](#) is another resource that shares voices and art from undocumented queer youth.

"OUR GSA CLUB HAD GREAT EXPERIENCES BRINGING IN SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS TO TALK ABOUT WHAT THEY'RE DOING. WE'VE HAD RELIGIOUS LEADERS COME IN, A LESBIAN PASTOR FROM A NEIGHBORHOOD CHURCH AND A TEACHER ON STAFF WHO IS MUSLIM. IT HELPS OPEN THE DOOR FOR STUDENTS WHO ARE GRAPPLING WITH THEIR FAITH AND QUEER IDENTITY. WE'VE SEEN TRANSFORMATIVE RESULTS AFTER. IT'S THEIR ONE SAFE SPACE TO TALK ABOUT SOMETHING REALLY DIFFICULT."

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