



The Youth Project's Gender and Sexuality Alliance Manual

V. 3.0 (2024)

**A Guide to All Things GSA for Students
in Nova Scotia**

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This manual was created to support Gender and Sexuality Alliances and the incredible work they do in Nova Scotia's schools and communities. This manual is intended mainly for use by students, but can also be used by GSA advisors (along with the GSA advisor handbook) and anyone else who is interested in forming or maintaining a GSA in their school. Within this manual, you will learn how to start and maintain a GSA in your school. Additionally, this manual will provide information on team work, communication, and leadership - the pillars of a successful GSA.

If you'd like any further information about how to support GSAs, or if you feel we missed something important in this manual, please contact The Youth Project at gsa@youthproject.ns.ca.

This manual was created in the Summer/Fall of 2024, drawing from a previous copy of the Youth Project's GSA manual. This copy does not have Covid-19 safety precautions written in. We are still living in a pandemic and that must be considered when taking part in school clubs like GSAs. Please alter the activities in this manual to best protect your school and community from not only Covid-19 but also any other easily transmitted illnesses (ie. colds and flus) as well as MPXV (M*nkeypox), which was declared a "Global Health Emergency" on July 23, 2022. When planning events make sure to ask your full GSA for their input on illness prevention measures, make sure also to either research yourselves or ask your advisor to research how best to keep everyone safe at that specific time. Sometimes you may have to cancel events to protect yourselves and your community. Canceling or rescheduling events for safety reasons can be a hard choice, but it is always a good choice. GSAs are about equity and community care, and doing your best to keep each other safe from illness is an important part of that.

About the Youth Project

The Youth Project is a non-profit organization that supports 2SLGBTQIA+ youth aged 25 and under across Nova Scotia within Mi'kma'ki. As a multiservice organization, we host an education team, programming team, and support services team with an aim to further the inclusion and wellness of 2SLGBTQIA+ youth through an anti-racist, anti-oppressive, trauma-informed framework that centers youth voice and community leadership.

Who, What, When, Where, Why & How of GSAs

What is a GSA?

Gender and Sexuality Alliances, formerly called Gay-Straight Alliances*, (GSAs) are student-led groups that strive to make their schools safer for 2SLGBTQIA+ youth through advocacy, awareness, education, and support efforts. They provide a venue for students to make friends in a safe and accepting space, as well as providing opportunities for students to get involved within their schools and communities while working for change. The purpose of GSAs varies from school to school. Some are sites for advocacy and awareness, while others operate more like support or social groups for 2SLGBTQIA+ youth.

*Recently the language has shifted from “Gay Straight Alliance” to “Gender and Sexuality Alliance” to better capture the diversity of sexual orientation and gender identity and to foster spaces that center 2SLGBTQIA+ students and their lived experiences.

Why is there a need for GSAs?

There have been significant legal milestones towards combating homophobia and transphobia in Nova Scotia over the past decade, with the inclusion of Gender Identity and Gender Expression in the Nova Scotia Human Rights Act in 2012, the implementation of funding for gender-affirming surgeries through MSI alongside a bolstering of transgender healthcare through the Halifax Sexual Health Clinic, the IWK Trans Health Team, Sexual Health Nova Scotia, and the removal of some barriers to accessing gender-affirming care province-wide in 2022. Additionally, conversion therapy was banned across Canada in January 2022, with Bill C-4 making it illegal to try to change someone's sexual orientation or gender identity. Further, there have been important steps towards guideline revisions, amendments, and inclusive education policy such as the implementation of gender-neutral pronouns (they/them) in public education databases through the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. While these are historic steps towards equality, homophobia, and transphobia are still prevalent in Nova Scotia schools and communities.

In Nova Scotia, it has been found that being a member or being perceived to be a member, of the 2SLGBTQIA+ communities was the most likely factor to attract bullying (MacKay, 2012). The NS Department of Education and Early Childhood Development reported in their 2023-2024 Student Success Survey that in the last school year, half of 2SLGBTQIA+ students experienced homophobia and/or transphobia, and 70% of 2SLGBTQIA+ students witnessed such incidents. 44% of 2SLGBTQIA+ students reported feeling unsafe or

threatened at school in the past month, and of those students, 65% reported social factors such as bullying, gossip, and being left out to be the source of their feelings of unsafety. In contrast to the 2018-2019 Student Success Survey, the rate of 2SLGBTQIA+ students feeling unsafe at school has been rising. These statistics remind us of the importance of GSAs in our schools and communities. It is a collective responsibility to facilitate and support the need for safer spaces where youth feel empowered. GSAs work to make schools safer, and free of harassment, bullying, isolation, and oppression. These spaces encourage youth leadership, and peer-to-peer learning, and prioritize safer exploration making them fundamental to change-making in our education system. GSAs can also be a space for allies and families to support their friends, peers, and children in a safe environment without fear or harassment. Ultimately, GSAs make schools safer for all youth, no matter their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Who can be involved in GSAs?

Anyone! A GSA should be made up of 2SLGBTQIA+ students and their allies, along with at least one staff advisor. It is important to strive to make your GSA as inclusive as possible, there should be a constant effort to make sure that it is a space free of homophobia, transphobia, ageism, racism, classism, sexism, ableism, fatphobia, and any other forms of discrimination. As a way to remove barriers to participation in your GSA, you may consider making leadership roles and passive roles depending on the needs, skills, interests, and capacities of your GSA and school. For example, a GSA can consist of a core GSA committee that meets weekly and a larger GSA that meets with the committee bi-weekly. This structure allows for the

core GSA committee to take on tasks that require more urgency and care while having a larger GSA that can provide a safe space to more students without expecting a particular form of participation or productivity.

Where do GSAs meet?

A GSA will try to meet in the safest space possible. This can be a supportive teacher's classroom, the library, the school's Youth Health Center, student services, guidance office, etc. Something you can consider to make your space safer is to choose a location where students can walk into the GSA meeting without being outed, such as a classroom in a hallway with low foot-traffic.

When do GSAs normally meet?

A GSA will typically meet during lunch hour or after school. Leaving school late or being bused in can sometimes be an issue, so lunchtime might be the best time for your GSA meetings, as it allows you to hold meetings that everyone can attend. When schools are consolidated, sometimes two separate meetings will be held, or two separate GSAs will be formed. Meetings should be regular, once a week, or at an interval set by the members.

Before You Begin

Here are a few things to think about specifically before you start putting together a GSA, but also once your GSA is up and running. Lots of what is mentioned in this section will focus on how to foster a diverse and intersectional GSA where everyone feels safe, accepted, and heard.

The Power of Representation: Valuing Every Aspect of Identity

People are shaped by many different experiences due to the many aspects of their lives, whether it is race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, ability, age, class, or religion. If we only look at one of these factors, we are missing important parts of that person's identity. It is important to celebrate the diversity within

your GSA, and local community, as well as include everyone when you discuss queer and trans people and the issues they may face. It is also important to look at how homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia interact with other oppressions, like racism, sexism, ableism, etc.

For members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, representation in your school can be so incredibly meaningful. To hear about a successful gay man in your history class, or to learn about a great trans poet in English class are wonderful experiences, rare as they may be. Being able to see your identity reflected in the classroom can bring validation and a connection to the lesson. Those with intersecting identities may never get to see themselves reflected - unless we are proactive and make it our priority.

We all have intersecting identities with various degrees of privilege. We are not just our sexual orientations or our gender identities. These exist within us alongside our racialized identity, our abilities or disabilities, our ethnicities, our cultures, our religions, and more. A pansexual woman of color won't just be pansexual; her experiences as a woman, and a woman of color, will impact her experiences in the world. These may be good experiences, but they also mean her life will be impacted by racism and sexism as well as homophobia.

It's important to look at our combined experiences so we as GSA members can identify the roots of our struggles, and look at how these ideas connect. Queer, Black author Audre Lorde has said "There is no such thing as a single issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives". We aren't just our sexuality or our gender

identity, we are complex beings that all carry multiple identities. We all live complex lives, and should not have to hide parts of ourselves away. We can, and should, be appreciated for our whole selves.

When we face multiple sources of struggle in the world, these are known as **intersecting oppressions**. **Oppression** is when a person is mistreated or exploited by others with power, and results in stereotypes, myths, and stigma about a group or a population. It is important that we look at how each of these identities intersect and make sure we are representing the whole person.

If we don't experience a form of oppression, we have **privilege**. Privilege is when a person has an unearned benefit or advantage. We do not exist in the world as purely privileged, or purely oppressed. But we may experience more privileges when we belong to groups who don't experience racism (being white), sexism (being male), cis-sexism (being cisgender), ableism (being non-disabled), fatphobia (being thin), etc.

Having privilege is not something we have to feel bad about, but we do need to talk and think about it! It is upsetting to think of someone cisgender and straight who doesn't believe homophobia and transphobia still exist in the world, because we know it's happening, and 2SLGBTQIA+ people can hear, feel, and see it. We all have a role in fighting homophobia and transphobia. It is the same with all other forms of oppression too. We have to acknowledge inequity and use our privilege to help fight oppression.

Who is centered?

As a GSA it is important that you work to center and uplift the thoughts and lived experience of multiply marginalized youth (youth who are not only queer but also marginalized in other ways). Some groups who are often overlooked are: BIPOC or racialized youth, trans youth (specifically trans women, girls, and femmes), newcomer or immigrant youth, disabled youth, and fat youth. It is crucial that these youth feel seen and heard in your GSA as this can help them feel safe and cared for.

Pay attention to who's ideas and thoughts are being heard in GSA meetings. If they are coming from the same few members or youth who all share similar identities, why is that? Are others being interrupted or talked over? Are multiply marginalized youth even attending meetings, sharing their thoughts, or a part of your GSA?

Keep in mind not to pressure anyone to share, but consider asking more outspoken members to step back so others have a chance to step up!

Inclusive Language

An easy way to help everyone feel included in your GSA is to use inclusive language. Avoid gendered language like "girls and boys" or "ladies and gentlemen", opt instead for terms like "folks", "people" or

“everyone”. You should also ask people what pronouns they use, or if you are referring to someone and don’t know their pronouns use a gender neutral pronoun like they/them or just use their name.

If your GSA finds itself in a situation where you must ask people to put their gender on a form or survey, question if you even need this information and why you are asking for it. If you do decide to include a question about gender, consider noting that sharing this info is optional. If it is deemed necessary leave a blank space so that people can write in their true gender, and not just pick between girl or boy. Consider asking your school to do this for their forms as well.

Make it a rule in your GSA that anyone can use their name and pronoun of choice, and other members will respect and use them. Make sure you know **when** and **where** people use these names and pronouns (just in the GSA? Just at school? Do their parents or teachers use them too?). Respect their confidentiality if these are just identities they use only at GSA meetings – it may be their only place to do so comfortably. Name-tags that include pronouns, or pronoun buttons/stickers are a great way to cut down on unintentional misgendering and/or mis/dead-naming - check out the resource section!

How to Start a GSA

There are many great resources out there for GSAs - check out the resource section! In preparing this manual, we drew inspiration from a variety of resources, including The GLSEN Jumpstart Guide (2003).

The Initial Steps

These are the basic steps for starting a school club, which we've adapted from the GLSEN Jump-Start Guide (2003). Each school and Regional Center for Education is different so please keep in mind that you may have to modify these steps to get your GSA started.

1. Check out your school's requirements for forming clubs

Ask a school staff member how to start a club in your school. Review the student handbook if your school has one or even ask other clubs how they got started!

2. Find an Advisor

A GSA Advisor is a supportive school staff member, they could be a part of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community or an ally. Supportive staff could be School Counselors, Youth Health Center Coordinators and Nurses, SchoolsPlus staff, or teachers. Part of the role of the Youth Health Centres (YHC) is to support GSA development in each of their schools.

3. Ask your advisor to inform the administration

While requests for GSA cannot be denied in Nova Scotia's public schools, it is still important to have the administration on your side. They can help you connect with teachers, parents, Youth Health Coordinators, and RCH Coordinators.

If your advisor meets resistance from administration, they should contact your Regional Equity Consultant (REC) and let them know you are unable to start a GSA. The REC can then reach out to the Youth Project for advice.

4. Find a meeting place

Pick a space that is physically accessible and where students can feel safe. Attending a GSA can be difficult! Many youth may feel uncomfortable or unsafe if their peers know they are a part of a GSA. There is no shame in this, but keep this in mind while looking for a

meeting place. GSAs will typically meet in a guidance office, Youth Health Center, Student Services office, or an advisor's classroom. Based on your needs, you might want to look for a more secluded space, like a classroom in a hall with little foot traffic. On the other hand, you may want to look for a place with lots of traffic, so it isn't so obvious why people are entering.

5. Advertise

Put up posters, use the announcements, or just tell your friends! Meet as a group to talk about how you want to advertise your GSA. You may need to point out that GSAs are 2SLGBTQIA+ focused but anyone interested in making schools safer for 2SLGBTQIA+ youth and promoting equity for all may join. It is important to let students know that allies may attend as it is often a good way for closeted youth or those questioning their gender or sexuality to join without outing themselves.

6. Hold your meeting

Time to get started! Check out the next section for ideas of things you can do during your first meeting!

7. Have your facilitator sign up for the GSA mailing list

The Youth Project has a GSA Facilitator Mailing List which allows advisors to share insight and resources with each other.

Mailing list link: <https://forms.gle/E5RkW8yoHqBknyWx7>

Fostering Teamwork!

Working together as a team is key to making your GSA thrive! It's easy to feel swamped with homework, exams, and everything else going on in your life, but teamwork can make the impossible feel possible. When everyone in your GSA takes on a role, shares responsibilities, and supports one another, you not only make events and activities happen—you build a stronger, more united community. Teamwork helps balance the workload, but it also brings in fresh

ideas, encourages creative problem-solving, and makes the experience more fun and rewarding for everyone. In this section, we'll dive into how great teamwork can take your GSA from good to amazing, and how each member's unique strengths can contribute to reaching your goals.

Create the Foundation of Teamwork

Working as a team can come with challenges, so it's important to get off to a good start. For your GSA, teamwork is all about ensuring everyone feels included and heard. To make this happen, start by setting clear community standards that focus on the core elements of teamwork. Community standards are the shared rules and guidelines that help everyone in your GSA get along, feel safe, and be treated with respect. These standards tell us how you should behave toward one another so that everyone feels welcome, valued, and supported. These might include:

- **Open and honest communication:** Encourage everyone to share their thoughts and feelings.
- **Active listening:** Do your best to give your full attention when others are speaking.
- **Working together:** Collaborate to reach common goals.
- **Contributing and participating:** Make sure everyone has a role and contributes to the group.
- **Commitment:** Show up for your GSA and follow through on tasks.
- **Accountability and Responsibility:** Take responsibility for your actions and hold each other accountable.
- **Respect:** Value and appreciate everyone's ideas and opinions.

By laying down your own ground rules, you'll create a supportive and safe space where everyone can thrive as a team!

Here is an activity you can facilitate at the beginning of each school year to make sure that everyone is on the same page as to what makes a team work well together!

Activity 1: The Slay Together, Stay Together Pact!

Suitable for Grades 4-12

Aim: This activity helps GSA members brainstorm what makes a dream team and identify potential challenges. Through fun and creative sticky note sessions, the group collaborates to create a set of rules that will guide how they work together. By the end, they'll have a personalized "Teamwork Hall of Fame" to keep everyone on track, motivated, and heard!

Time: max 45 minutes

Materials Needed: Large paper or poster paper, colorful markers, sticky notes, and maybe some snacks (because teamwork is better with snacks!).

Action 1 (10 minutes): "What Makes a Dream Team?"

Start by asking your GSA members, "What makes a dream team?" Get them thinking about what helps a team work well together.

- ***Sticky Note Brainstorm Party:*** Hand out colorful sticky notes and have everyone write down their ideas about what makes teamwork awesome. Suggestions like, "we don't talk over each other," "if we're too swamped, it's totally cool to share the load and tag someone else in!" or "we respect every fabulous idea!" Keep it fun and light!

Action 2 (10 minutes): "What Challenges Might We Face?"

Next, ask your GSA members, "What challenges could make teamwork hard?" Talk about what might bring the team down or throw some shade on their motivation.

- **Sticky Note Brainstorm Party:** Pass out more sticky notes and let everyone write down their thoughts on potential challenges. Ideas might include things like, "People talking over each other," "We're all too busy to handle everything," or "Not everyone feels comfortable sharing their ideas." Keep it playful but honest.

Action 3 (15 minutes): The Great Sticky Note Collab!

Now it's time to pull everything together!

- **The Great Sticky Note Collab:** Stick the **challenges** at the top of a big poster paper and under each one, match them with the **dream team** sticky notes that could be the solution. For example, if the challenge is "too busy to do everything," stick the solution, "if we're too swamped, it's okay to tag someone else in!" underneath. If your GSA members have any new ideas for solving challenges, this is their chance to add them! Write those extra solutions on new sticky notes and place them on the poster.

Final Step (10 minutes): Legendary Pact

As a team, look at all the ideas and choose 5 to 10 rules to live by as your GSA's Teamwork Hall of Fame. Have everyone sign the poster with their coolest doodles. Write down your rules somewhere everyone can easily revisit - like if it's safe, it can be your GSA's meeting space or your group chat, so you can always come back to them when things get a little messy.

Build Relationships

Teamwork is so much easier when you know and trust each other! Spend time getting to know everyone in your group—find out what you have in common or celebrate your differences. Icebreakers, group games, or just chatting before or after meetings can help build

these relationships. The stronger your connections, the better your teamwork will be.

Icebreakers: Icebreakers are used to get people talking and communicating with each other. Only a little information is typically revealed about each person during icebreakers, so your GSA will want to do more to build relationships!

Some Icebreakers Ideas

Two Truths and a Lie: Each GSA member takes turns sharing two truths and one lie about themselves. The other GSA member try to guess which statement is the lie. This makes getting to know each other fun and helps GSA members learn more about one another.

Hot Necklace: GSA members show an accessory they've with them (like a necklace, bracelet, etc.) and share what it reminds them of or what it means to them. This encourages the sharing of personal stories and helps to create deeper connections.

Name That Tune: Each GSA members play a short clips of popular songs and have other members guess the song title and artist. After each round, discuss why they like that particular song or what it means to them.

Events for GSA Members: Movie night, crafting, pizza party, bowling, picnic? These are just a few fun things your GSA can do together! Create memories and have lots of laughs together!

Teamwork Activities: Whether you love them or hate them, team-building exercises are a great way to get to know members of

your GSA and to learn how you work best together. Here are some excellent activities that provide your team with the opportunity to work together to achieve a task.

Activity 2: Pass the Story

Suitable for Grades 4-12

Aim: To encourage creativity, listening skills, and teamwork by collaboratively building a fun and unique story together.

Time: 15-20 minutes

Steps:

1. Gather everyone in a circle or line.
2. Start the story with one sentence, like *“Once upon a time, a rainbow appeared in the sky, but something strange happened...”*
3. Each person takes turns adding one sentence to build on the story. Make sure they listen carefully so their sentence fits with what came before!
4. Keep going around until the story reaches a fun or surprising conclusion. Encourage everyone to be as creative and imaginative as possible!

Activity 3: Art Collector

Suitable for Grades 4-12

Aim: To encourage self-expression and enhance group connection by allowing

students to convey their identities through art.

Time: 15-20 minutes

Materials: Paper (one sheet per student), Pencils, Carayons

Steps:

1. **Distribute Materials:** Hand out a piece of paper and a pencil to each GSA member.
2. **Set the Drawing Challenge:** Explain that they will have 5 minutes to draw a picture that represents who they are, without using any words or numbers.
3. **Drawing Time:** Allow GSA members to focus on their drawings for 5 minutes.
4. **Collect the Drawings:** After the time is up, collect all the pictures and shuffle them.
5. **Guessing Game:** Show each drawing to the group one at a time, encouraging GSA members to guess who the artist is based on the artwork.
6. **Announce the Winner:** Keep track of who guesses the most correctly. The GSA member with the most correct guesses is named the "Master Art Collector!"

Wrap-Up Discussion: Conclude the activity with a discussion about how each drawing reflects different aspects of identity, fostering a sense of connection within the group.

Activity 4: "Question Box" (15-20 minutes)

Suitable for Grades 4-12

Aim: This activity gives the group a chance to learn more about each other's thoughts, motivations, and sense of humor while strengthening communication and connection among group members. It builds deeper connections, as participants understand each other's perspectives and personalities better. It's also a great way

to create a positive, supportive group dynamic.

Time: 20-25minutes

Materials: Paper or sticky note, pencil, and a box or bag

Steps:

1. **Writing the Questions:** Give each GSA member a sticky note and a pen. Ask them to write down a fun or thoughtful question that can lead to interesting conversations. These questions should be a mix of lighthearted and deeper topics. Examples could include:
 - “If you could have any superpower, what would it be?”
 - “What’s one thing you’re most excited to do with the GSA this year?”
 - “What really motivates you in life?”
 - “Share one of the funniest moments you’ve ever had in our GSA.”
 - “If you could visit any place in the world, where would you go and why?”
2. **Collecting the Questions:** Once everyone has written their questions, have them fold the sticky notes and toss them into a box, jar, or bag. This adds a sense of mystery and anticipation!
3. **Drawing and Answering:** Take turns having each person draw a question from the box and read it aloud. The person who drew the question answers it first, and others in the group can join in if they want. Everyone is encouraged to answer at least one question, but no one is forced to participate if they feel uncomfortable.
4. **Add Extra Fun:**
 - **Speed Round:** In a second round, make the answers faster! Each person only has 30 seconds to respond. This keeps things lively and ensures everyone stays engaged.
 - **Surprise Questions:** Towards the end, throw in a couple of unexpected questions like, “If you were an animal, what dance move would you bust out?”
5. **Wrap-Up:** At the end, discuss the funniest or most thought-provoking answers as a group.

Activity 5: Bridge It!

Suitable for Grades 8-12

TIME: 30-60 minutes

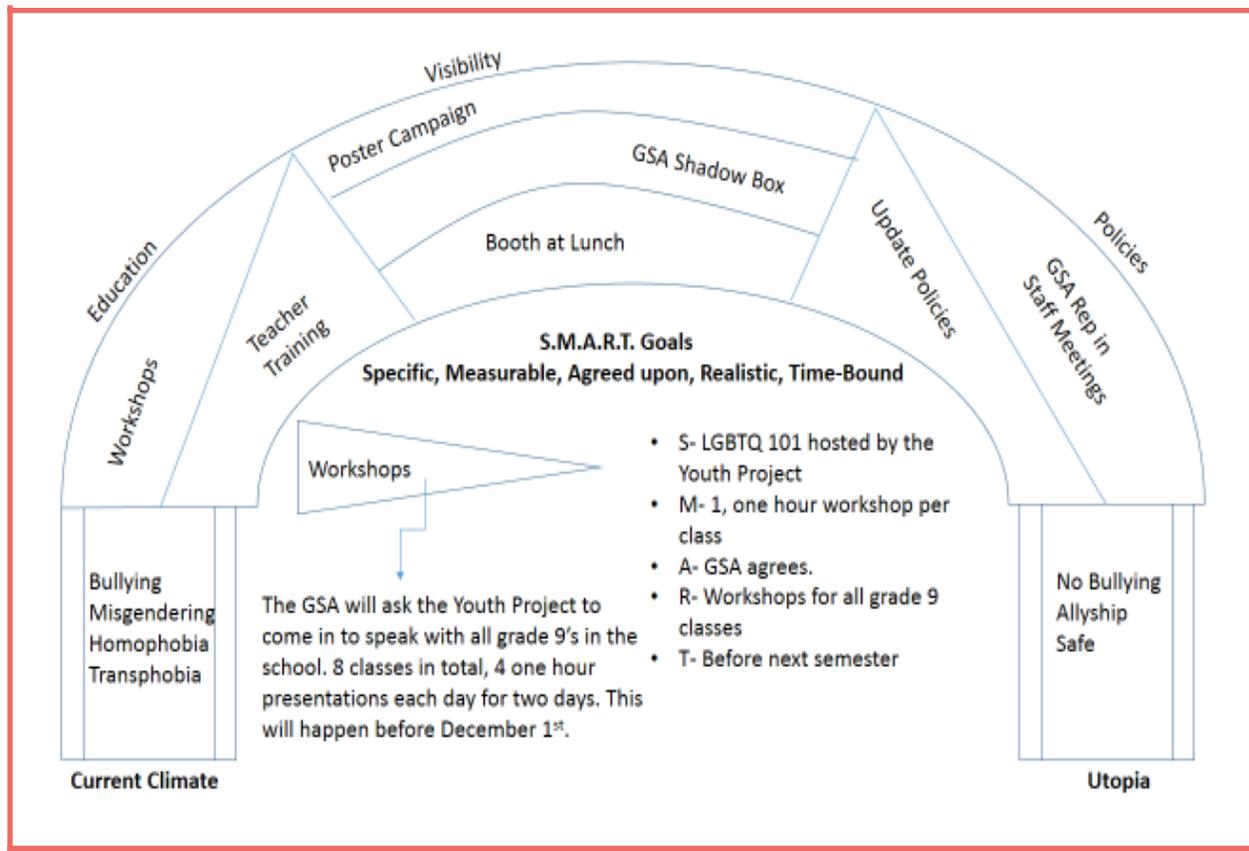
Materials: Markers, Flip chart paper or white board

Aim: To focus ideas your group has into workable goals.

Steps:

1. Start by drawing the left side pillars of a bridge, this will be where the current climate of the school will be outlined. How do youth feel about their school now? What kinds of things do 2SLGBTQIA+ students face every day?
2. Then draw the right side pillars of the bridge, this will be where your group would like to see their school. The utopia or best-case scenario for where the students would like to see their school. Everyone getting along, no bullying, and safe.
3. The center of the bridge will be made up of 3 to 5 sections of how the group thinks it can bridge the gap. Each section should be a broad idea like education or visibility. Once that is completed, take each larger section and break it down into bricks; more tangible ideas. If you started with visibility, a brick might be a poster campaign or a booth at a school fair. Do this for each of the larger sections and pick one or two activities from each section the group would really like to do. Once you have those break each activity down into S.M.A.R.T. Goals (defined in the diagram below).

EXAMPLE:



Build Skills

Everyone in the GSA brings something unique to the group. Some people are good at organizing events, while others might be great at social media or leading discussions. Recognize and use each other's strengths! You can also work together to build new skills or learn from each other, like how to draw, how to have difficult conversations, or how to plan and run a project.

Here is an activity that will guide you in building skills. Before you begin, you can download the Skills Checklist (Adapted from: 2017, Services for Youth) [here](#).

Activity 6: Super Skills Mapping!

Suitable for Grades 6-12

Aim: This activity helps recognize and develop skills, strengthening the GSA as a community. It helps students identify their existing skills and the ones they want to develop, using a pre-made handout. This will help them see how their skills can contribute to the GSA's goals and identify ways to improve.

Time: 35-40 minutes

Materials:

- Handouts: Pre-made handouts listing 6 skills sets, download [here](#).
 - Colored markers/pens
 - Poster board or whiteboard (for the GSA's "Super Skills Map")
 - Stickers (optional)
-

Step 1: Superpower Selection (10 minutes)

- Give each GSA member a handout listing skills
- Ask them to review the skill sets and mark the skills they see as their "superpower."
- Bonus: For the skills they want to learn or develop, ask them to draw a cloud next to those skills.

Step 2: Superpower Mapping (10 minutes)

- GSA members will briefly share the skills they marked as their superpowers. Each person explains why they feel strong in that skill.
- They can also share which skills they are interested in learning or developing.
- On a large poster board or whiteboard, each GSA member writes down their

superpower under the corresponding skill set on the map (e.g., students who marked Communication as their strength will add their name to the Communication section).

Step 4: Discussion (15-20 minutes)

Facilitate a group discussion around these questions. You keep in mind the *Roles and Responsibilities Section* in the GSA Student Manual.

1. How do these skills translate to working well in a GSA?
 - Example: Those with communication skills can help with public speaking or organizing outreach.
2. What skills complement GSA roles and responsibilities?
 - Example: Organizational skills may help with event planning and logistics.
3. What roles would each GSA member like to take on based on their skills inventory?
 - Example: Leadership skills might lead someone to take charge of a campaign or project.
4. What are some ways each GSA member can build these skills?
 - Example: Attending workshops from community organizations, participating in youth conferences or seminars, etc.

Bonus: You can learn from each other. Each month, you may highlight a skill from the group and try to plan activities that incorporate that skill. (e.g., If someone's skill is public speaking, they can help lead a meeting or present on an important topic).

Conflict Resolution

Conflicts are normal, even in the best teams. GSAs often bring together a very diverse group of people with a range of experiences and personalities. What matters is how you handle them.

When conflict occurs, it can create a divisive environment, impede effective teamwork, and in the worst cases cause a GSA to fail. If people disagree, try to understand their point of view and calmly talk it out. Use "I" statements like, "I feel upset because..." instead of blaming others. If things get heated, take a break and come back to the conversation when everyone is ready to listen and compromise.

Here are 12 steps that can help cool down conflicts and make everyone feel more understood and safe.

1. **Create a Safe Space:** Make sure the area is safe by removing anything that could cause harm or trigger someone.
2. **Ensure Privacy:** If possible, move to a quieter place to help reduce feelings of stress or being overwhelmed.
3. **Keep a Comfortable Distance:** Stand about 1.5 to 3 feet away to give space, and if you need to get closer, explain why so they don't feel scared or confused.
4. **Stay Calm:** Keep your voice steady and your body language relaxed. How you act can influence the situation.
5. **Avoid Big Reactions:** Don't show shock or panic, as it might make things worse. Remind yourself you can handle the situation.
6. **Be Empathetic:** Show that you understand their feelings. Use phrases like, "I get how you feel" to show you care.
7. **Ask Open-Ended Questions:** Avoid yes/no questions. Instead, ask things like, "What's going on?" to better understand their perspective.
8. **Listen Closely:** Focus on what the person is saying. Feeling heard can calm people down.
9. **Set Clear Boundaries:** If behavior becomes too aggressive, say something like, "If you keep interrupting, I'll need to ask

someone else to step in,” or “If you don’t calm down, we’ll have to take a break.”

10. **Avoid Power Struggles:** If they challenge your authority, don’t argue. Instead, guide the conversation back to solving the problem.
11. **Offer Choices:** Give them options so they feel some control over the situation.
12. **Give Space:** Sometimes, taking a short pause or allowing them space to think can help calm things down.

Don’t wait so long to ask for help. You can work with a mediator, such as your GSA advisor or school counselor.

Remember, every conflict is a chance to learn! Helping you grow through these experiences strengthens your GSA community.

Now What?

How to keep your GSA running!

Congratulations! You have now started a GSA but that is just the beginning. Now you have to decide what you stand for, what you are going to do, and how you are going to keep your members inspired and involved in your GSA.

In this section, there are methods and suggestions to keep your GSA running, but don't feel like you have to follow these tips and tricks step by step. Adapt these suggestions to your own GSA, as no two GSAs are the same.

Create A Mission Statement

The role of GSAs varies from school to school. While creating your mission statement, consider the why the GSA was created in your school. Does your GSA exist to provide support, social opportunities for 2SLGBTQIA+ youth, advocacy, provide education around the issues of sexual orientation and gender identity, or all of the above!

The following tips for developing a mission statement have been compiled and/or adapted from a variety of resources.^{1 2}

What is a mission statement?

A mission statement should say what you are, what you do, what you stand for, and why you do it. It reflects your goal, action plan, or public relations piece.

How to write a mission statement?

Most mission statements tend to be a few precisely written sentences. You don't have to put it a lot.

Before you start writing, it's better to examine other mission statements to get ideas for your own.

It needs to be clear, so avoid humour and sarcasm. Simplicity, frankness and inclusivity are key components to a mission statement.

An effective mission statement is best developed with input by all members of the GSA. You might need to have 2 to 4 meetings with your GSA to develop an effective mission statement. Having time to revisit your discussion allows for more input and final editing.

Mission Statement Examples:

The Youth Project. Our mission is to make Nova Scotia a safer, healthier, and happier place for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth through support, education, resource expansion and community development.

¹ GLSEN. (2003) The GLSEN Jump-Start Guide . www.glsen.org

² Chandra Herbert, R., & Frohard-Dourlent, H. (2016). Call Out: A GSA manual. Vancouver Coastal Health.

MOSAIC at Auburn Drive High School, Halifax, Nova Scotia.

The mission of Mosaic is to provide a safe, supportive, and welcoming environment, which accepts all persons regardless of sex, race, gender, sexuality, religion, past experiences, etc. to lend a non-judgmental and confidential ear, to help people better understand themselves and others through positive discussion, to educate students, teachers, and administration about sexuality and gender identity, to combat harmful stereotypes about sexuality and gender identity, and to enjoy ourselves while doing all of these things.

The Harry Jerome High School³ GSA brings together students of different sexual orientations and gender identities to meet new people, hang out, eat food, and have fun. We will coordinate outings, dances, movie nights, and other activities. By celebrating gender and sexual diversity in all our activities, we will make our school a safer place for everyone.

Here is an activity that you can use for these meetings.

Activity 7: Our Mission Is...

Suitable for Grades 6-12

Materials: Markers and Flip Chart Paper

Time: 30 minutes

Prep: On four pieces of flip chart paper write: “What is our GSA?” “What will our GSA do?” “What does our GSA stand for?” “Why is it important?”

Discussion: Bring up a couple points for each question to guide the brainstorming.

For example:

What is our GSA?: Club, student led, support group, safe space;

What will our GSA do?: Support, education, advocacy, socialize;

What does our GSA stand for?: A world with no fear, harassment, discrimination;

Why is it important?: Inclusion, safety, acceptance, awareness.

³ Chandra Herbert, R., & Frohard-Dourlent, H. (2016). Call Out: A GSA manual. Vancouver Coastal Health

Brainstorm: Ask the GSA to contribute to each of these lists. It might be helpful to get them to think about what the GSA means to them!

Action: Use the various points the GSA contributes to create the base of your GSA's mission statement. Take a point or two from each of question and develop a concise mission statement!

Assign Roles

Running a GSA can be tricky, and it works best when there are committed student leaders that will help keep the GSA focused and on track with its mission statement.

You may want to hold elections at the end of every school year. This is called an Annual General Meeting (AGM). During this event, members of the GSA will declare their candidacy for positions, such as the ones suggested in this guide. An election should be held at the AGM, where members of the GSA vote for their preferred candidate for the positions.

If your GSA is more interested in just hanging out and having fun you may not need to assign roles. You also don't need to fill any or all the positions listed here. Just do what works best for your group!

Chair/Co-Chairs

A Chair/Co-chairs are the leaders of the GSA. It is their role and responsibility to keep the GSA moving forward. They guide meetings, help to support other members in completing tasks, and work with advisors to keep school administration up to date.

People who make great chairs are passionate about the work of their GSA, and are committed to attending meetings. Prospective chairs should also be comfortable speaking in front of a group, or be ready to work hard to improve that skill.

Opting for Co-Chairs (two or more people as “heads” of your GSA” can be very helpful. Oftentimes a Chair will end up being someone who is set to graduate at the end of the school year, so having one or more other people who have experience chairing can help make the transition between school years easier. Plus having more than one person ready to lead a meeting means that if one chair can’t make it there won’t be a scramble to find a leader.

Secretary

The Secretary is responsible for taking, and distributing, meeting minutes and keeping the records of your GSAs activities and resources.

Secretaries have to take quick and concise notes about what is said in GSA meetings, so people who make great secretaries might also take great notes in class or are willing to learn/work on that skill in GSA. The Secretary should also keep copies (digital or physical) of posters, flyers, or other materials so any member can access them in the future.

Sometimes it can be helpful to share the work of note/minute taking, so having other GSA members on standby to take meeting minutes is always a good idea.

Treasurer

The role of Treasurer depends on your school's policies but generally the Treasurer is responsible for knowing what the financial situation of the GSA is.

The treasurer needs to be able to keep a budget, and calculate costs for events. Great treasurers might have experience budgeting from home, work, or classes, but they might also just be quick with a calculator and have an eye for numbers.

Event Coordinator(s)

GSAs meet on a regular basis to plan events, activities, and advocacy efforts together as a group. It is up to the Event Coordinator to come to meetings with ideas in mind, but also once the event has been decided upon, it is the Event Coordinator's role and responsibility to coordinate and delegate all the duties that must be done to make it a success!

A list of common positions in middle and high school GSAs is provided in the [GSA Roles and Responsibilities](#) doc, along with a link to their respective roles and responsibilities.

Educate Yourself

It is important that everyone who is part of a GSA, in roles or as members, is continually learning about sexual orientation, gender identity, and how they intersect with other identities. Consider starting your GSA meetings with a few terms and definitions related to sexual orientation, gender identity, or intersectionality!

- Know terms and definitions related to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity
- Commit to keep learning (language changes constantly, there is always more to learn!)
- Use appropriate language
- Don't make assumptions about folks that attend GSA
- Ask people what their pronouns are and in what spaces you are allowed to use those pronouns (You might be able to in the GSA but not in the rest of the school as someone who is trans might not be out)

How to Run a GSA Meeting

1. Create an Agenda

An agenda is a list of things you would like to discuss during your meeting. Everyone can contribute to creating the agenda, but one person should make a main list of agenda topics and record what

was said about each topic. This is called taking minutes, and they should summarize what is said about each agenda item.

When you start a meeting it is helpful to go over the meeting minutes from the previous meeting to refresh everyone's memory and to also ensure that any action items were followed through on. Action items are tasks that people volunteer for to complete in a certain period. *Here is an example for clarity.*

Agenda, Meeting Minutes, and Action Items Example:

1. Introductions

2. Review previous meeting minutes *(The numbered statements are an agenda item)*

Action items from last week:

- Advertise Dance (Skylar)- They completed this through the display board, morning announcements, and posters.

- Buy Decorations (Teacher Smith) - They purchased streamers, balloons, and a helium tank. They spent \$25.81.

3. Theme for next display board

- Alex would like to do 2SLGBTQIA+ History month- educational

- Skylar thinks a board for Asexuality Awareness week- raise awareness

- Jessie would like an Ally week board- help combat myths about GSAs.

- Vote called: 12 members present, 2SLGBTQIA+ History Month won with 7 votes.

Action Item: Jessie, Avery, Quinn and Skylar will start preparing for the board and bring their findings to the next meeting.

4. Planning for GSA Dance on Thursday

- *Jordan, Ali, and Charlie will decorate for dance on Thursday afternoon*
- *Skylar and Jessie will collect the dance tickets and cash*
- *Avery and Sam will prepare the music- send requests their way!*
- *Teacher Smith will work with the AV club to set up the sound*

2. Start with Introductions

Facilitate introductions! Go around the room and ask people to say their name and their pronouns. (When asking folks to share, avoid saying “preferred pronouns.” A person’s pronouns aren’t preferred, they just are!) You can also ask a check-in question to help people open up a little before the meeting starts. For example: If you were a jellybean today, which color/flavor would you be?

3. Ice Breakers!

Ice Breakers can be helpful activities to get conversation started and help people feel at ease. (Check out the Ice Breaker ideas on #22)

4. Create a community standard agreement for your GSA

Community standard agreements often consist of a list of expectations and behaviours that members of the GSA try to model in order to keep the space as safe and welcoming as possible.

Creating these agreements together helps to ensure that everyone is on the same page. If someone's behaviour is disruptive, they can be reminded of the community standards. Guidelines should be posted every meeting and at every event. They can, and should, be added to and changed at any time based on a group consensus.

Example of community standards at a Youth Project:

Community Standards from Transformative Futures Registrants

- Mute mic when not speaking
- Respect pronouns
- Don't pressure others into sharing their experiences
- Use "I" statements
- Do not equate experiences of oppression/ marginalization (i.e. being queer and being disabled)
- Be mindful of confidentiality
- One person speaking at a time
- Minimize background noise

Some examples of pieces you may wish to add to your community standards agreement are:

- **Respect Others:** We are all different and worthy of being treated with kindness and compassion. It is important to meet people where they are at without judgment and in a respectful manner. When people enter a GSA for the first time they may be hearing lots of ideas that are new to them. If views happen to oppose your own, keep an open mind and listen.
- **Speak for I:** Everyone experiences the world in their own unique way. No one experience is ever truly the same as another. Use statements such as "In my experience..." to talk about your experiences being part of, or working with, 2SLGBTQIA+ communities.

- **Be Open to New Ideas:** Recognizing and valuing that everyone has different experiences and ideas can truly enrich a GSA. Be open to change!
- **Respect Confidentiality:** Attending GSA meetings as a 2SLGBTQIA+ student can make someone feel vulnerable or intimidated. Knowing that they are in a safe and confidential place can help alleviate some of their concerns. As a GSA, commit to confidentiality. Do not “out” people in your GSA to students outside of the GSA. When telling stories, do not use identifying characteristics when talking about people, including real names, family situation, grade, etc.
- **Right to Pass:** If you do not feel comfortable speaking, know you always have the right to “pass.”
- **Step Up, Step Back:** While your opinions are important to the group, make sure that you are not the only one contributing. Know when to take a step back so everyone gets a chance to add their thoughts to the conversation.

5. Discuss when is best to meet in the future

It is usually best to meet once a week at the same time and place every week. If you are preparing for an event, it might be useful to meet additionally, but try to keep your main meeting consistent.

6. Assign a meeting facilitator

The meeting facilitator will help the group stay on track. Taking on this role helps to build leadership skills. Don't be afraid to speak up and stop conversations when they get too off topic. Use a speakers list to help ensure everyone gets a chance to talk. Check out the sections “*Assign Roles*” and “*Build Skills*” for more details on how you can divide GSA responsibilities!

7. Make sure everyone gets to contribute

Consider having your facilitator or advisor call on people who put their hands up in the order their hands were raised. They may wish to write names down as they see their hands raised so it is easy to keep track of whose turn it is to speak next. For example, let's say your GSA is discussing what activity they would like to do next. If someone is talking about an idea they have, instead of interrupting them to discuss your thoughts, you would put up your hand and be added to a list by a facilitator. The facilitator would go through the list in order of people who were added to it. It is a helpful way for a facilitator to keep track of who would like to speak and helps to prevent people from interrupting, and monopolizing conversations while encouraging people to listen to one another.

Making Decisions

There are different systems that your GSA can use to make decisions. Consensus and Majority Rules are the common way for making decisions.

Consensus: where everyone must agree to the decision being made. All members must be given the opportunity to speak about the decision if they would like.

Majority Rules: where the group votes to make a decision. A majority wins over 50% of the group votes for a decision. You can adjust this any way you'd like as a group. Perhaps 75% of the group must agree for the decision to pass.

However, you can be creative and more affirmative in your GSAs! While you are making decisions, you can focus on how you get there. In the Emergent Strategy, adrienne marie brown frames decision-making through the lens of natural systems, flexibility, and collaboration. Here the key principles related to decision-making you can keep in mind:

1. **Adaptability and Flexibility:** Decisions should not be rigid or fixed but adaptable to changing circumstances. This means making decisions based on present realities rather than sticking to a pre-determined plan, allowing for fluidity in the process.
2. **Collaboration and Collective Wisdom:** Rather than top-down or leader-driven decision-making, focus on collective wisdom and the contributions of communities. Decision-making becomes a shared process where all stakeholders actively participate and contribute.
3. **Small Decisions with Big Impact:** Large-scale change can happen through small, intentional decisions. Every decision, no matter how small, contributes to the larger picture of transformation, so small steps are seen as crucial.
4. **Natural and Organic Processes:** Decisions evolve over time, much like processes in nature. Rushed or forced decisions are discouraged; instead, there is a focus on allowing decisions to grow organically and develop at their own pace.
5. **Trial and Error:** Mistakes are part of the decision-making process, and learning from failures is essential. There's an emphasis on embracing unpredictability and remaining flexible, recognizing that not all decisions will lead to immediate success but can still be valuable.

Plan Your School Year

Now that your GSA has outlined its mission, it is time to start planning what you'll do! Two frequent problems GSAs encounter at this stage is either having no ideas, or having so many ideas that they don't know where to begin.

If you don't know where to begin...

- Check out the GSA Calendar in the Create Your own GSA Calendar section (page#54)! It outlines celebration, advocacy and awareness days that your GSA can plan events around.
- You don't always need to plan around the special days outlined in the GSA Calendar, head to the Plan *Projects and Events* section for some ideas!

If you have too many ideas...

- Start to pare down what you'd like to achieve in the school year! See Ready, Set, GO! On the next page

Activity 6: Ready, Set, GO!
Suitable for Grades 4-12

Aim: Decide as a group how you want to take action!

Materials: Markers and Flip Chart Paper

Time: 30 minutes

Prep: On flip chart paper, write down the various project ideas and events that the group has.

Discussion: As a group, discuss what you can realistically achieve each month, semester, and school year. Each GSA member and advisor needs to keep in mind other commitments with school work, other clubs, and extracurricular activities.

Brainstorm: Decide as a group what would be an ideal number of projects to commit to.

Action: Every student in the GSA will grab a marker and put a mark on the project or event they would like to do, limiting the number of marks they have to the number of projects the group can commit to. For example, if your GSA can commit to 6 projects for the school year, each student will be able to select, or put a mark, on 6 projects or events they are interested in. In the end, the projects and events with the most marks beside them will be what your GSA works on!

Actions and Advocacy

Whether you're just starting or have been involved in your GSA for a while, this part of the manual is here to help you bring your ideas to life through thoughtful planning and meaningful action. Advocacy comes in many forms—self-advocacy, community advocacy, and allyship—and each is vital in making your voice heard and creating lasting change.

For elementary school students, advocacy may not always look like grand, organized campaigns, but that's okay! The most important step is learning how to advocate for yourself and your friends. Through small acts of allyship and self-advocacy, you are already laying the foundation for community advocacy, which grows as more people unite to create a supportive and inclusive space.

In the following pages, you'll explore tools and strategies to build your GSA, plan impactful projects, and create safe spaces for

everyone. From setting up your own GSA calendar to planning events and fundraising, each section is designed to empower you and your group to make a difference—no matter how big or small.

Let's dive in and get started on taking action!

The Three Stages of a GSA

GSAs grow and become more thriving by focusing on three key stages. It starts with learning for yourself, then sharing what you've learned with your school, and finally, bringing those lessons to the wider community. Let's break it down!

1. Self-Teaching (Educating Yourself)

Before you can make change in your school or community, it's important to learn as much as you can about 2SLGBTQIA+ issues, history, and how to be supportive. In this stage, your GSA will focus on educating yourselves.

- **Group Discussions:** Talk about 2SLGBTQIA+ topics that interest you, like history, important figures, or current events.
- **Guest Speakers:** Invite people from the community to speak about their experiences and share knowledge.
- **Workshops/Trainings:** Do activities to learn more about things like being an ally, understanding gender identities, or dealing with bullying.
- **Reading/Watching:** Watch documentaries, read books, or listen to podcasts that help you better understand 2SLGBTQIA+ experiences.

This stage helps your group members feel more confident and informed. The more you know, the better you'll be at educating others and making positive changes.

2. Inward/School Teaching

Once you've learned together, it's time to bring that knowledge to your school. In this stage, your GSA can start sharing what you know with other students and teachers to make your school a more inclusive place.

- ***School Events:*** Organize fun and educational events, like 2SLGBTQIA+ History Month, Pride celebrations, or movie screenings. These are great ways to spread awareness and bring people together.
- ***Workshops for Students:*** Offer optional training sessions or discussions for students who want to learn how to be better allies, understand pronouns, or create safe spaces.
- ***Staff Training (Optional):*** You can also offer to help teachers and staff learn about 2SLGBTQIA+ issues. These might be optional workshops where staff can learn about using respectful language, supporting 2SLGBTQIA+ students, and creating inclusive classrooms.

By teaching others in your school, you create more allies and help build a safer, more welcoming environment for 2SLGBTQIA+ students.

3. Outward/Community Teaching

After educating your group and school, the final stage is creating an impact beyond your own school walls. This is about reaching out to

other schools, communities, and even working with school leadership to create more lasting change.

- **Multi-School Events:** Team up with other GSAs from different schools to organize larger events, like conferences, pride parades, or joint workshops. It's a great way to connect with other 2SLGBTQIA+ students and build a bigger community.
- **School-Wide/Community Training:** Advocate for more structured, mandatory training for all students or teachers. This could be anti-bullying programs, 2SLGBTQIA+ sensitivity training, or ensuring that 2SLGBTQIA+ topics are included in the school's curriculum.
- **Conferences:** Attend or organize conferences where students from different schools and even regions can come together to learn, share ideas, and support each other.

In this stage, your GSA is working to make big, lasting change—not just at your school, but in your whole community. It's about building connections and helping more people understand the importance of 2SLGBTQIA+ inclusion and support.

As your GSA grows through these three stages, you're not just making changes for yourself—you're creating a ripple effect that impacts the people around you and your community. Think of it like a social ecosystem, where every action you take in your GSA influences other parts of society.

Each stage not only helps you grow personally, but also empowers you to make a difference in your relationships and community. As you learn about 2SLGBTQIA+ issues, you start to change how you see yourself and others. By sharing your knowledge with your peers

and your school, you create a supportive environment where everyone feels seen and heard. Finally, when you take your advocacy into the wider community, you contribute to a larger movement for change.

This journey highlights how your individual actions can connect with and impact different levels of society, leading to greater equality and liberation for all. Understanding this model can help you see the bigger picture of how GSAs play a vital role in promoting positive change, not just in your school but in the world around you.

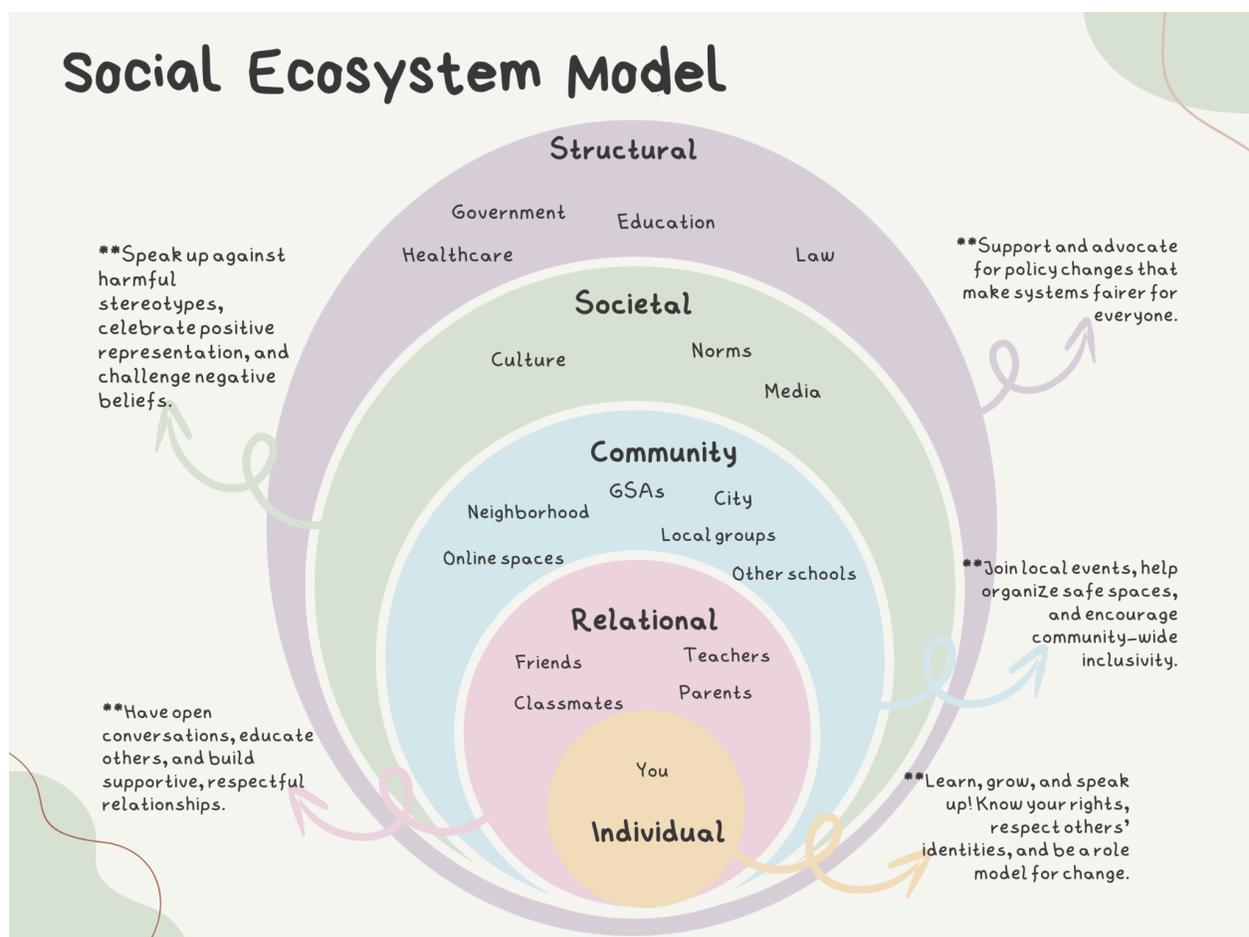


Image Description: The image is a diagram representing a Social Ecosystem Model. It includes five different broad categories which make up a society and the smaller pieces that fit into each category. These include: Structural (Government, Education, Healthcare & Law), Societal (Culture, Norms & Media), Community (Neighborhood, GSA's, City, Online Spaces, Local Groups & Other Schools), Relational (Friends, Teachers, Classmates & Parents), and Individual (You). Each broader category fits into another (beginning with Structural and ending with You), emphasizing the interconnection between each aspect of society and how they influence one another. The diagram emphasizes the importance of speaking up against harmful stereotypes, supporting policy changes for fairness, and building supportive relationships within communities. It describes how different ways of being engaged in activism help influence the various aspects of society in unique ways.

Large, lasting changes happen gradually through small, interconnected actions. Here are 9 practical tips from adrienne maree brown for applying this approach to our work in social change and justice:

9 TIPS FOR EMERGENT STRATEGY

by adrienne maree brown

Small is good, small is all.

Change is constant, be like water.

There is always enough time for the right work.

There is a conversation that only the people in this room right now can have. Find it.

Trust the people, if you trust them they become trustworthy.

Move at the speed of trust, connection is more important than mass.

Less prep, more presence.

What you pay attention to grows.

Never a failure, always a lesson

Image Description: The image is a text-based graphic with nine tips for emergent strategy by adrienne maree brown. The tips include (1) the importance of small actions, (2) being adaptable to change, (3) prioritizing the right work, (4) finding/engaging in conversations based on your unique group, (5 & 6) trusting and connecting with others, (7) prioritizing showing up for your group, and (8 & 9) celebrating your processes/mistakes and learning from them.

Create Your own GSA Calendar

Grab a blank calendar and start planning! Make sure your events are evenly spaced out, giving your GSA lots of time to plan and prepare between each event. Record your planning and prep days on the calendar as well as your regular meetings.

It can also be helpful to do this in an online calendar (like Google Calendar) so everyone in your GSA can have access to your shared calendar. If you want something colorful and templated with important dates, you can see the [GSA calendar](#) we've prepared for you and use it to map out your own events and programs!

Important Dates for Your GSA Calendar

Many GSAs plan their projects and events around advocacy and awareness days. Check out this calendar for relevant dates you may want to organize around. Note these may be subject to change, and you should check online for the specific date just to be sure!

September

16th-23rd - Bisexual Awareness Week

23rd - Celebrate Bisexuality Day (aka Bisexual Visibility Day)

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October

2SLGBTQIA+ History Month

Mi'kmaq History Month (a month celebrating the indigenous Mi'kmaw peoples who have stewarded this land since time immemorial)

1st - Treaty Day (a day commemorating the signing of the Peace and Friendship treaties by the Mi'kmaw peoples and the British crown)

11th - National Coming Out Day

19th - Spirit Day (a means of speaking out against 2SLGBTQIA+ bullying and standing with 2SLGBTQIA+ youth)

20-26th - Asexual Awareness Week

26th - Intersex Awareness Day

** ** ** ** ** **

November

8th - Intersex Solidarity Day

13th-19th - Transgender Awareness Week

20th - Transgender Day of Remembrance

** ** ** ** ** **

December

1st - World AIDS Day

3rd - International Day of Persons with Disabilities

10th - Human Rights Day

** ** ** ** ** **

February

African Nova Scotian and Black History Month

14th - Pink Triangle Day (a celebration of a [Canadian] queer publisher overcoming an illegitimate legal battle in 1979)

20th - World Day of Social Justice

** ** ** ** ** **

March

Bisexual Health Awareness Month

31st - International Transgender Day of Visibility

** ** ** ** ** **

April

9th - International Day of Pink (anti-bullying)

12th - Day of Silence (a day of silent protest of bullying and harassment against 2SLGBTQIA+ students)

26th - Lesbian Visibility Day

** ** ** ** ** **

May

Asian and Pacific Islander Heritage Month

7th - National Child and Youth Mental Health Day

17th - International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia (IDAHaT)

24th - Pansexual Visibility Day

** ** ** ** ** **

June

Indigenous History Month

Pride Month! - check out when your community's Pride events are

21st - Indigenous Peoples Day

The Youth Project's Queer Prom - (varies by year)

** ** ** ** ** **

July

Disability Pride Month

Plan Projects or Events that Meet the Goals of Your GSA!

Planning a project or event for your GSA can be a powerful way to create change, build community, and have fun! If you're excited about making an impact, this section will walk you through everything you need to know—but remember, you don't have to run a project if it doesn't feel like the right fit for your GSA. If you do want to take on a project or event, though, this section will guide you through the process step by step. From setting clear, achievable goals with the S.M.A.R.T. framework, to organizing and executing your vision, we've got you covered!

Don't worry if it sounds overwhelming—along the way, we've included templates, checklists, and resources to help keep things on track. You don't have to go big; even small projects can make a lasting difference in your school and/or community. Whether it's organizing a Pride day, hosting a discussion, or launching a campaign, this is your chance to create something meaningful that reflects your GSA's unique goals and values!

Before Begin: S.M.A.R.T.

I know it sounds a bit too much like school, but how are you going to know what you're doing, or when you are doing it, until you put it down on paper and map it out? Try using the S.M.A.R.T goal method:

S – Specific: Instead of just saying “Paint a mural,” make sure the goal is something like “we want to paint a mural of a rainbow on the south side of the school next to the main doors.”

M – Measurable: Know when you want the goal completed and make a timeline on how you're going to do so. Example: On April 23rd we will have the mockup of what the mural will look like. By May 5th we will have the principal's approval for the planned mural. By May 17th we will have all the supplies ready to go. On May 23rd we will start the mural.

A – Attainable: Are you able to accomplish what you want when you want it? Does the school approve of the project? For example: The principal has allowed us to paint the Mural.

R – Realistic: Is your goal too high? Maybe there is something to do to downsize your goal to make it more realistic and use fewer resources. Example: Instead of painting 20 square meters of the wall, we will only paint 7 square meters, reducing costs.

T – Time: Do you have enough time to complete the project? Do you have a proper and realistic time allotted to complete the goals at hand? Do you have extra time in the schedule in case the schedule encounters any obstacles?

In order to successfully meet your goals for the year, it is best to divide and conquer! If your GSA is large enough, consider assigning more formalized roles.

Planning Project & Event

One person can't do it all! If everyone contributes as a team, you can achieve so much more. The following section will outline what you need for your project to be successful.

- **Ensure your project or event aligns with your S.M.A.R.T. Goals**
See "Start Planning" for more information about S.M.A.R.T. Goals.
- **Create a timeline**
Create a calendar for your GSA and plan out each month and each school year. Use your calendar to not only plan out your events but also your meetings.
- **Create a supply list as a team**
Outline what you will need for your event. Plan for the best, prepare for the worst! Bring more than you need if you are leaving your school. Buy slightly more than you need if you are making food or any other sort of take away. Make sure to assign people to buy the supplies and bring them!
- **Assign Tasks**
Everyone should be given the opportunity to take on tasks in order to be prepared for your event! Outline what needs to be done and when it needs to be done by. Add this information to your GSA Calendar and record it in your meeting minutes. Co-chairs or advisors should check in regularly with members

to ensure that tasks are on track. If members are not completing tasks, use the check-in to find out if they need additional support or if the task needs to be reassigned.

- **Work within your Budget**

Some GSAs are given more money than others by their school's administration, but did you know that GSAs are entitled to money as a school club? Ask your facilitator what budget you have.

Once you have an idea of what you are doing as a GSA, estimate how much each activity or event will cost. Keep in mind costs related to:

- Food
- Decorations
- Equipment rental
- Travel costs
- Guest speaker fees
- Accommodation
- Supplies

If you find your GSA does not have enough funding to do all of your planned events, consider fundraising. Check out the Projects, Fundraisers, and Events section for fundraising ideas!

- **Advertise**

Determine who you want to participate or engage with your project and start spreading the word! If you want the whole school to participate, advertise school-wide with posters, announcements, or even by going around class to class!

- **Joint Projects**

Some people might think that GSAs are only for 2SLGBTQIA+ students, but that's not the case. One strategy to bridge this potential gap is to partner with other school clubs or groups. Work together to determine which group will be responsible for outlined tasks and how each group will financially contribute.

- **Work on your project during GSA meetings**

You might find it helpful to do most of your planning and prep for events during your GSA meetings. For example, if you are creating buttons for a campaign, prepare them together as a GSA a few weeks in advance of your campaign launch.

- **Ensure your events are inclusive of everyone!**

General Access: If your event is smaller, like just for GSA members, ask people to fill out and submit an access rider (an explanation and template can be found on page#64). For a larger event, try asking folks to submit their access needs in advance directly to a GSA member or via a google form or similar platform.

Language: When advertising for events use language that is easy for people to understand. If your school has not had significant education around sexual orientation and gender identity avoid complex terms.

Have an ASL (American Sign Language) interpreter present if your school has D/deaf or HoH (hard of hearing) students or if you are inviting guests in from the community. It can also be helpful for

speakers to use a microphone if you are in a large space or the person speaks quietly.

Space: Think about the access needs of your GSA, school, or community. Find a space that is accessible for people who use wheeled mobility aids like wheelchairs or rollators. You should also, depending on the kind of event, try to find a space without lots of background noise so it is easier for people to hear and/or process what is happening. (something about thinking about access also talk about access guides)

Content: Explore other elements of diversity in your project including race, ethnicity, age, and ability. Check out [Wheel of Privilege and Power](#) for grasp of identity and representation.

Financial Accessibility: Free events mean that everyone who is interested can participate! If your event is a fundraiser, have a pay-what-you-can option.

Executing the Project or Event

1. Create supply checklists

You will need a checklist to keep track of the supplies you will need for the event including any crafts/posters you may need to create. Make sure to be detailed!

2. Pack your supplies in advance

Having all of the supplies in easy to carry packs can save a lot of time and make sure you don't forget anything the day of the event. Make sure you have everything! Things like tape may seem like a no brainer, but can be overlooked when people get busy.

3. Give yourself lots of time to set up

There are bound to be a few bumps in the road along the way. Giving yourself lots of time to set up will cut down on stress and give you time to fix anything that may go wrong.

4. Be outgoing and engaging!

The best part of hosting an event is getting people engaged in the cause! If your GSA is fun and engaging, people are more likely to take notice and want to join or help out.

5. Celebrate Yourself and Debrief

After any GSA event, take time to celebrate all the hard work you and your team put in! Whether it was a big event or a small meeting, it's important to recognize what you've accomplished. Celebrating your success helps you feel proud and excited for the next thing you'll do. After that, have a quick debrief with your group. Talk about what went well, what was challenging, and how people felt during the event. This way, you can learn from the experience and make future events even better. It's all about growing, learning, and supporting each other!

You can review the templates for your project or event planning:

Program Planning Template ([Doc](#) / [PDF](#))

Event Planning Template ([Doc](#) / [PDF](#))

[Event Checklist \(PDF\)](#)

Some Project and Event Ideas

Here are some fun and impactful project and event ideas for your GSA to help raise awareness, build community, and make your school a more inclusive space for everyone. Before planning these activities, be sure to check availability and exchange ideas with your GSA advisor, and adjust them according to your school and GSA environment.

Advertise Your GSA

Create posters, flyers, or social media campaigns to promote your GSA around the school. The more visible your group is, the more people will feel welcome to join and participate.

Create a Bulletin Board Highlighting Influential 2SLGBTQAI+ People

Design a bulletin board to showcase important 2SLGBTQAI+ figures, their contributions, and how they've shaped history. This can help raise visibility and educate your school community.

Collect 2SLGBTQAI+ Books for the School Library

Work with your school librarian to expand the library's collection of 2SLGBTQAI+ books. This could include fiction, non-fiction, and resources for students looking to learn more about 2SLGBTQAI+ identities.

Make a GSA Video

Create a video about your GSA to promote its mission, highlight its activities, and invite more students to join. This can be shared in classrooms or during school events.

Document Your GSA's History (Junior High and High School GSAs)

Take time to document the history of your GSA. Share past

achievements, important events, and stories of impact to inspire new members and celebrate the group's journey.

Build an Ally Network

Get teachers and staff involved by inviting them to join an Ally Network, or start your own Ally Card Program, where allies show their support for 2SLGBTQAI+ students by displaying ally cards in their classrooms or offices.

Launch a Ribbon Campaign

Create and distribute ribbons that represent support for the 2SLGBTQAI+ community. These could be worn during specific awareness days or distributed to allies.

Make T-Shirts or Goodie Bags

Design and create GSA-themed t-shirts or goodie bags. These can be sold or distributed to raise awareness, build group spirit, and spread positive messages about your GSA.

Paint a Mural

Collaborate with your GSA members to paint a mural. It could feature handprints or 2SLGBTQAI+ symbols, either outside, in the halls, or in the GSA office. This will visually represent the inclusivity and support your group provides.

Transgender Day of Remembrance (TDOR/TDOV) Announcements

Create a series of FAQ-style announcements for Transgender Day of Remembrance and/or Transgender Day of Visibility to educate your school about the importance of the day and its significance to the 2SLGBTQAI+ community.

Celebrate Educational-Themed Months

Organize events or activities to celebrate months like Black History Month, 2SLGBTQAI+ History Month, and Indigenous Peoples' History

Month. Use these times to highlight intersectional identities and contributions.

Policy Review (Junior High and High School GSAs)

Advocate for changes to school policies around overnight trips, gendered activities in gym class, washrooms, and anti-discrimination policies to ensure they are inclusive of different sexual orientations and gender identities.

Assess Your School's Climate (Junior High and High School GSAs)

Conduct a survey or discussion to assess how inclusive and safe your school is for 2SLGBTQAI+ students. Use this information to advocate for necessary changes or improvements.

Advocate for 2SLGBTQAI+ Curriculum (Junior High and High School GSAs)

Work with teachers and administration to advocate for the inclusion of 2SLGBTQAI+ issues and history in the school curriculum. This helps to ensure that students learn about diverse identities and experiences.

Hosting events is a great way to build community, raise awareness, and create safe, fun spaces for 2SLGBTQIA+ students and allies. Here are some event ideas for your GSA to organize:

Dance

Host an inclusive dance where all students can feel safe and welcome to express themselves. Create a fun, affirming space where everyone can celebrate diversity in a judgment-free zone.

Bring in 2SLGBTQIA+ Speakers and Workshop Facilitators

Invite 2SLGBTQIA+ speakers, activists, or workshop facilitators to

lead sessions on topics like gender identity, 2SLGBTQIA+ rights, mental health, and allyship. These events can provide valuable education and inspiration for students.

Host a Movie Night

Organize a movie night featuring films that highlight 2SLGBTQIA+ themes and stories. You can check [Youth movies on NFB](#) or [Youth in Motion on Frameline](#). After the movie, host a discussion to talk about the film's messages and how they relate to current issues faced by the 2SLGBTQIA+ community.

Coloring Book Session

Organize a coloring session using resources like the [Queer & Trans Coloring Book – Gay City – Seattle’s LGBTQ Center](#) OR [LGBTQ+ History Coloring Book](#) by GLSEN.

Potluck

Plan a potluck where GSA members and allies can bring food from home and share a meal together. This is a relaxed and informal way to build friendships, celebrate cultural diversity, and strengthen the GSA community.

How to: Access Riders

What is an Access Need?

Access needs are supports, items, and practices that allow for full and complete participation in a meeting, group or program.

A common misconception is that only a select few have access needs; however, we all have needs that must be met for us to show up and do our best work.

What is an Access Rider?

A document that outlines your access needs. Sometimes it is called an access document/doc.

Access riders are a great way to affirm relationships of trust, and create space for ongoing communication.

How to Make an Access Rider

Think of some things that have made spaces feel more welcoming/accessible, in your experience.

- For in person events
- For online meetings
- At in person GSA meetings

Examples of Access Riders

Online	In Person Events
→ Using a meeting platform with closed captioning	→ An accessible gender neutral/all

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Having a dedicated person to read the chat aloud → An agenda provided in advance → A clear start and end time → Option to have camera off → Various options for participation → A follow up email with deadlines → Move breaks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> gender/single stall washroom → Awareness of food options for intolerances/allergies → A ground floor meeting space → Chairs without/with arms → Public transit/parking → COVID protocols → Move breaks
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How to: Trans-Inclusive GSA

Gender-based discrimination affects everyone. Protecting everyone’s right to express their gender in the way that makes them feel the most comfortable should be important to everyone who wants to make their school a safer space. Being trans-inclusive means that your GSA and its members commit to an ongoing process of education, and that you make an effort to ensure that all of your activities and advocacy efforts are inclusive of transgender people and issues related to gender identity.

1. What’s your GSA’s name? Although your GSA may be trans-inclusive in a number of ways, the term Gender and Sexuality

Alliance means everyone is welcome. Make sure your name reflects everyone in the 2SLGBTQAI+ acronym. Be creative and have fun with it!

2. If your GSA asks for gender on a form or a survey, don't use checkboxes with "Male" or "Female". Leave a blank line and allow people to write it in. This allows people to identify however they would like. Always question if you even need this information and why you are asking for it. If you do decide to include a question about gender, consider noting that sharing this info is optional. Consider sharing this information with your school for their forms as well.

3. Create a safe space for self-identification. Make it a rule in your GSA that anyone can use their name and pronoun of choice, and other members will respect and use them. Make sure you know when and where people use these names and pronouns (just in the GSA? Just at school? Do their parents or teachers use them too?). Respect their confidentiality if these are just identities they use only at GSA meetings – it may be their only place to do so comfortably. Name-tags that include pronouns, or pronoun buttons or stickers are a great way to keep everyone on track.

4. Advocate for gender-neutral spaces in your school. Places like washrooms, changing rooms and locker rooms can be unsafe, uncomfortable places for people who are transgender. While everyone has the right to be safe in every place at school, some people will find a gender-neutral space safer and more accessible, and it may allow them to participate in activities and events they may otherwise stay away from.

5. Don't separate your GSA into "boys" and "girls" for activities. For some this may seem harmless, but for a student who is trans, or

questioning their gender, this can be an alienating and even traumatizing situation. Challenge yourself to notice the ways that you gender things and ask yourself why. Consider reasons that gendering activities might be problematic for trans as well as non-trans participants.

6. Design and lead a gender sensitivity training for students and/or teachers at your school. Get folks talking about gender categories and gender-related expectations (What do we expect from women and men? Are they different?).

7. Include trans content and representation in your routine. Make sure when choosing movies, celebrities, and discussions there is an equal amount of trans representation. If you plan on having a movie night there are a number of trans focused movies to choose from, if you need any help just ask The Youth Project as they have a library of movies and can give you some great ideas. If you plan to have more than one movie night (once a month or once per semester) make sure to include trans focused movies in rotation. A gay/lesbian movie in January means a trans movie in February.

8. Have copies of “[Supporting Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Youth](#)” for students in Nova Scotia. Read through it and have a good understanding of what students’ rights are when it comes to gender identity and expression. You can review sections related to changing name and pronouns, sport participation, washroom/changeroom access, sleep away camps, and many more.

9. Always keep in mind that when you talk about gender, don’t overstate it. Your goal should always be to allow people to feel comfortable. If you sensationalize trans/gnc people 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.

10. Educate yourself and others. Bring in books, current events stories and articles about trans/gnc people. Talk about them in your GSA.vCheck and make sure that your GSAs outreach and publicity materials include information about trans issues.

Fundraising

Fundraising is a great way to bring your group together and build support for your GSA. Raising funds for your GSA can help support events, projects, and supplies. There are many fun and easy ways for fundraising! You can organize a bake sale, sell handmade crafts, or create and sell GSA-themed t-shirts or buttons. Another idea is to host a talent show or art sale, where people can donate to participate or attend.

Before planning a fundraising event with your GSA, be sure to work with your GSA advisor and school administration to get approval for any fundraising activities, and don't forget to promote your fundraiser to get as much support as possible!

Coffee House

Coffee and entertainment is a great way to spend an evening! You can host an after school coffee house at your school and charge a small admission or "pay what you can" to see students, GSA members, or community members perform music, poetry, or anything else. This is a great way to mingle with people outside of school hours and really get the community involved, inviting parents, siblings, or other GSAs to come.

Bring Your Own Banana Ice Cream Bar

Bringing your own banana or fruit of choice to a GSA ice cream bar not only cuts down on costs but adds to the experience! People can pay by a donation or “pay what you can” for a bowl of ice cream and sprinkles, candy, or whipped cream. There are some great lactose free frozen desserts if you need to substitute, check out your local grocery store for all the options available. Just make sure to ask about allergies!

Art Sale or Talent Show

Are there artists, craftspeople, and makers in your GSA or broader community who would like to sell their art and wares to fundraise for your GSA? Partial funds can go to the GSA and partial funds can go to the makers to ensure they're getting paid for their labour! If you are planning a fundraising event for Art Sale, you can reach out Youth Project to get information about possible art donation companies or collectives.

Trivia Night

Put together a trivia night with questions on various topics, including 2SLGBTQAI+ history, pop culture, or general knowledge. Teams can pay to enter, and you can offer a prize for the winning group. This is a great way to combine education and fun while fundraising for your GSA.

All in all, school can be a great place for fundraising. You rarely get so many people eager for excitement in one place, so get permission and get going! Another option to explore fundraising opportunities is applying for microgrants. Microgrants might be available through local municipal or provincial programs. Although grant deadlines can shift, researching potential opportunities can be an exciting

mini-project for older youth, helping them learn about securing resources to support your group's activities. If you have questions about micgrants might be available you can contact Carmel via carmel@youthproject.ns.ca.

Protections for 2SLGBTQIA+ Youth in Nova Scotia

Nova Scotia Human Rights Act Amendment

In 1996, sexual orientation was added to the Nova Scotia Human Rights Act. This means a person has the right to be free from discrimination on the basis of their sexual orientation.

In 2012, Bill 140 passed to include gender identity and gender expression to the Nova Scotia Human Rights Act. The inclusion of gender identity and gender expression to the Nova Scotia Human Rights Act provides transgender and gender non-conforming Nova Scotians with the protection against discrimination, including in employment, schools, facilities, housing, and when negotiating gendered spaces.

This includes transgender, cisgender and non-binary people who dress and express themselves through gender non-conformity.

“Conversion Therapy” Bans

The Nova Scotia government banned the use of “conversion practices/therapy” (a discredited way of attempting to change someone’s sexual orientation or gender) for anyone under the age of 19 in 2018. This was a huge step for protecting 2SLGBTQIA+ youth in the province from the pain of this practice.

In January of 2022 a new law came into effect drastically restricting the practice of “conversion therapy” throughout Canada. This law makes it illegal to force someone to undergo “conversion therapy”, take a minor abroad to undergo “conversion therapy”, as well as profit from, promote or advertise the practice of “conversion therapy”.

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development’s Guidelines for Supporting Transgender and Gender-nonconforming Students

The guidelines are a booklet of 7 basic guidelines that help a student and their family transition through school years. It covers things like name and pronoun usage in school, negotiating gendered spaces, legal documents, and more. The guidelines are available on our website (under Resources), and the website of the Department of Education.

The Nova Scotia Education Curriculum.

Students in Nova Scotia are supposed to learn about gender identity, sexual orientation, and about homophobia at different

grade levels. You can find these topics in the NS Education Outcomes, at <https://curriculum.novascotia.ca/>

Troubleshooting

Problem: BIPOC/disabled/newcomer/trans-femme youth don't feel comfortable in our GSA.

Often when multiply marginalized youth seem uncomfortable it is because they don't feel heard or seen. Examine your core GSA or the folks who have been there the longest and see if they share common identities. Commonly white cis (or trans masculine people depending on the situation) non-disabled people will make up the majority of a 2SLGBTQIA+ group, and while their thoughts and lived experience are valuable they often are very different from those of youth with other marginalized identities. Make sure to allow time to listen to the thoughts and experiences of these youth.

The key is to intentionally leave space for everyone to share. Make time to listen to the thoughts and experiences of those who might not often speak up. Their perspectives are equally important in building a safe, inclusive environment. We encourage each GSA to create their own community standards from the ground up, ensuring they reflect the unique needs and voices of all members. This bottom-up approach allows each GSA to foster a space where all youth feel seen, respected, and empowered to share their stories.

Problem: GSA is a “gay club” or a “straight club”.

Part of the reason the GSA acronym has shifted to stand for gender and sexuality alliance is because everyone has a gender and a sexuality. You may need to focus on getting your message out to your school community that you value and include people of all sexualities and genders, or brainstorm as a group on how to better include others.

Problem: Our GSA is clique-y, and new people have a hard time being included.

Find ways to seat yourselves so newer people are sitting with established GSA members or your bigger social groups are dispersed, and that everyone has contributed to group discussions or planning sessions (unless they invoke the ‘right to pass’). If you’re a large group, break out into smaller groups for discussion. Schedule ice-breakers into your meetings so you’re always learning new things about each other. Make a point to reach out to new members for their ideas and input. Students can be excited to hang out in a safe space, but make sure you’re reaching out to new people: they want to be a part of it too.

Problem: We can’t find a staff advisor!

A great start to finding a staff advisor is to ask a trusted teacher, guidance counselor or health nurse directly. Sometimes teachers just don’t think they have the skills to help in a GSA. You can show them this manual and the Advisor manual to give them some ideas.

Problem: Our posters keep getting ripped down

Having an area in a display case for your GSA to advertise and show its presence is a great idea. Not only can you have your GSA meeting

time and room but you can showcase some of the great things your GSA is doing. It is also important to be persistent. If your posters are being torn down keep putting them up! Ask the administration to make announcements about leaving school posters on the walls. Don't get discouraged!

Problem: The school said no to us forming a GSA.

All schools in Nova Scotia must support interested students in the development of a GSA according to the Department of Education's Guidelines for supporting Transgender and Gender-nonconforming Students. If you are facing this kind of barrier, reach out to us here at The Youth Project at gsa@youthproject.ns.ca. We can help you strategize

Problem: Our meetings are being crashed.

Make sure you are meeting in a safe space. If the meetings are being crashed because they are in an area that other students need to access it might be time to find a new space. If someone is crashing to make the space purposefully unsafe, talk to your advisor about it. Another way to make sure everyone is there for the right reasons is to start your year with community standards and check back regularly to make sure they are still covering the group's needs.

Problem: Someone I don't like is in our GSA!

Learning to work with others is part of becoming young adults, try to focus on the group's tasks and keeping your GSA a safer space. If the conflict escalates, then try mediation. Have your GSA advisor or a peer mediator be part of a discussion between you and the other youth to help you resolve the problem. While participating in a GSA, all people need to be invested in making a safe space for others. This

includes a safer space for you, and the space you help create for others.

Problem: Our meetings are not working out well because everyone is talking at once

Raising hands is a great way to make sure everyone is getting their voice heard. The facilitator, either your advisor or GSA leader, can make a list of each person who raises their hand to speak and write their name down in that order on a list. Once your name is called you have the floor with no interruptions until you are finished.

Problem: There are people making transphobic comments in our GSA!

Starting your GSA with community standards can set the rules each student feels is needed for the group, make sure to revisit these periodically throughout the year. Educating the GSA members on what language is not tolerated and what is transphobic is also a good place to start. Once everyone is educated and the rules are set make it clear that homophobia, transphobia, or bullying of any kind will not be tolerated in GSA. There are also resources and videos you can explore together on combating transphobia.

Problem: Our teacher advisor is too overbearing.

A great place to start is having your advisor read the GSA Advisor Handbook is also a great way to give them more knowledge on how to be a better advisor. Suggest ways to share leadership of the GSA, like students creating an agenda and running a meeting, or bringing forth a project you want to work on. Step forward and ask to take on more leadership tasks.

Problem: Our leader is... well... not a good leader

Many great GSAs work with a council instead of just one leader. This way more members can have a say in final decisions and everything is put to a vote. You can also revisit *Making Decisions* section in this manual.

Problem: People in our GSA are not following the rules.

Creating a policy for your GSA based on the community standards your group works out can have a great impact on the GSA. Having a solid policy makes the rules “official” and lets people know if the rules are not followed there will be consequences.

Problem: Our GSA cannot seem to settle on a decision.

You can revisit *Making Decisions* section in this manual. If your GSA needs more solid system, then you can set up a system of decision making. For example: There must be a majority (2/3 of the people present) in order for a motion to pass.

Possible decision making models include:

- Unanimous - A process called consensus is used to make sure everyone at the meeting agrees on the decision. This involves discussion when there is a dissenting opinion.

- Majority or 2/3 vote - This model usually works best when only club members present at the meeting are given a vote. You may want to publicize the meeting agenda beforehand so people will know what is being discussed (and will be more likely to show up if they feel strongly about the issue and want to be involved in the decision-making process).

- Club members have ultimate decision-making power. This model may include further levels of decision-making power, such as

Leaders--> President/Advisor-->Administration. This can give power to a small number of people and lead to being undemocratic, so choose this model carefully and make sure your leaders will represent the GSA's best interests.

Resources for GSAs

The Youth Project: www.youthproject.ns.ca

Link to the Youth Project's monthly newsletter:

<https://mailchi.mp/6c1eba5043ab/sign-up-for-our-newsletter>

The Nova Scotia GSA Conference: <https://www.nsgsa.org/>

A Guide to Virtual GSAs from EGALÉ:

<https://egale.ca/awareness/a-guide-to-virtual-gsas/>

BC Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity education:

<https://bc.sogieducation.org/>

Add: Name-tags that include pronouns, or pronoun buttons/stickers are a great way to cut down on unintentional misgendering and/or mis/dead-naming

YP Gender and Sexual Alliances NS Website: <https://gsanetworkns.ca>

Templates:

[GSA calendar](#)

Program Planning Template ([Doc](#) / [PDF](#))

Event Planning Template ([Doc](#) / [PDF](#))

[Event Checklist \(PDF\)](#)

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