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## Table of Contents

What is a Gay Straight Alliance	3
How to start a Gay Straight Alliance	4
How to have a Kick Ass GSA	5
Sample Mission Statement	6
21 Ways to get more members and allies	7
Fun things to do with a GSA	8
GSA Leadership	9
Decision making in a GSA	10
Legal information for a GSA	12
How to facilitate a meeting	14
Fundraising for a GSA	15
How to plan an event	18
Coalition Building	19
Building an Anti-Racist GSAs	20
Transgender Inclusivity in GSAs	22
Peer Education Workshops	24
What ever Super-Rad Straight Ally should know	27
Conducting a School Survey	28
School Climate Survey	30
Why Immigration Rights are a Queer Issue	31



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*ADAPTED, WITH PERMISSION, FROM THE GAY-STRAIGHT ALLIANCE NETWORK [www.gsanetwork.org](http://www.gsanetwork.org).*



## What is a Gay-Straight Alliance?

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

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

Other GSAs are activist clubs and have worked to get LGBTQ issues represented in the curriculum, LGBTQ related books in the library, and progressive non-discrimination policies implemented at a district level. For example, many GSAs in Texas are working to insure that their school district adapts a policy which prohibits discrimination in schools on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity. Additionally, many GSAs have participated in activism outside of their school on a city or state level.

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



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# How to Start a Gay-Straight Alliance:

## 1. Follow Guidelines

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

## 2. Find a Faculty Advisor

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

## 3. Inform Administration of Your Plans

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

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

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

## 5. Pick a Meeting Place

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

## 6. Advertise

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

## 7. Get Food

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

## 8. Hold Your Meeting!

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

## 9. Establish Ground Rules

Many groups have ground rules in order to insure that group discussions are safe, confidential, and respectful. Many groups have a ground rule that no assumptions or labels are used



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about a group member's sexual orientation. This can help make straight allies feel comfortable about attending the club.

### 10. Plan For The Future

Develop an action plan. Brainstorm activities. Set goals for what you want to work towards.

### 11. Lobby Days / GSA Activist Camp

Contact the Network in help organizing your GSA club to participate in the largest Texas LGBT youth lobby days at the State Capitol. The GSA Activist Camp is a 3 day intensive training for GSA leaders throughout Texas. ([www.texasgsa.org](http://www.texasgsa.org))

## How to Have a Kick-Ass GSA:

### Establishing Your Club's Purpose

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

### Preparing for Meetings

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

### Running a Good Meeting

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



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### Creating an Action Plan

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

## Sample Mission Statements:

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

## 21 Ways To Get More Members & Allies:

1. Provide food at your meeting
2. Put an announcement in the daily bulletin or assembly
3. Advertise at club day - have a table and pass out ribbons or lollypops with a sticker with the name of your GSA
4. Participate in school pride or spirit week at your school
5. Set up an info table at lunch or special events in a visible place
6. Pass out rainbow ribbons or GSA buttons to GSA supporters
7. Make flyers or posters about specific meetings, topics, or events and post around campus  
\* *Example: Make flyers defining what a straight ally is with information about your GSA at the bottom*
8. Ask teachers to permanently post your group's general flyer in their classroom
9. Get an article about your group in the school paper
10. Hold a "bring-a-friend day" at your GSA meeting
11. Have an open GSA meeting where you show a movie or have a speaker
12. Make presentations at other clubs' meetings about your group; invite these clubs to make presentations at your GSA meeting.
13. Send group representatives to classes to make an announcement about your group's meetings or activities
14. Put together a panel of speakers for a conference or similar event
15. Set up a time to speak to teachers at faculty meetings or help conduct a teacher in-service/teacher training
16. Create a display in your library (i.e. for Queer History Month) or display case in a hallway
17. Practice Guerilla Theater: stage a public exchange between GSA members about homophobia or transphobia and your GSA
18. Participate in the Day of Silence Project: [www.dayofsilence.org](http://www.dayofsilence.org)
19. Invite teachers, faculty, and staff to GSA meetings
20. Write a letter to your school board asking for support
21. Spread the word! Tell others about your GSA!



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# Fun Things To Do With Your GSA:

## 1. Movie Night

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

## 2. Host a BBQ or Picnic

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

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

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

## 4. Plan Outdoor Activities

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

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

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

## 6. Arts and Crafts

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

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

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

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

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



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### 9. Host a senior graduation party

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

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

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

### 11. Host an awareness day at your school

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

### 12. Check out Texas GSA Network Resources and Events

[www.texasgsa.org](http://www.texasgsa.org)

## GSA Leadership:

### Choosing an Effective Leadership Model:

#### *How will your club's leadership be organized?*

#### What will be expected of club leaders and who will they report to?

First, be sure to check whether your school policies require a particular leadership arrangement.

- **Hierarchy-based leadership**--President (or Co-Presidents), Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, etc. This format can be useful for getting things done because it has well-defined roles and designates a clear chain of responsibility.
- **Board-based leadership**--Your club has a "board" of people who lead the GSA. Each board member has a defined leadership role which covers a major areas of responsibility (examples: Facilitator or Chair, Outreach/Publicity Coordinator, Program Coordinator, Funding Coordinator, Grade Representatives, etc.). This model tends to be more egalitarian than the hierarchy-based structure; while leadership positions are well-defined, board members make decisions collectively and report/answer to the whole group instead of a President or Co-President.
- **Committee-based leadership**--specific committees are formed to address particular GSA objectives or needs and are led by committee "chairs" which give individual reports at large-group meetings. Sample committees include: fundraising committee, events committee, publicity committee, visibility and education committee, etc. Usually, this structure works best for larger clubs. To combine this leadership model with the one above, consider having committee chairs also meet as a leadership board.



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- Remember that these leadership structures can be adapted or combined to fit your club. Or, you can develop your own model. If your club uses another leadership structure that works well, let us know about it!

### **Establishing a Meeting Structure:**

#### ***How often will your club leaders meet?***

#### **Will leadership/committee and large-group meetings be combined or separate?**

- Some GSAs have club leaders meet weekly or bi-weekly outside of the large group, and then give a report and present items for vote, etc. Others combine leadership and large group meetings, where officers or board members give reports to the whole club and everyone is involved in discussing important items.

- GSAs that have a committee-based leadership structure sometimes design meetings to include both time for separate committees to meet and large-group presentations/decision-making.

#### **Suggestions and Guidelines for Transitioning GSA Leadership Smoothly:**

- Set up a mentoring system. Have future leaders work with current leaders to gradually become more comfortable with leadership positions.
- Transfer leadership during the year. Some schools transfer leadership at the end of first semester. This way, new leaders can be assisted by old leaders.
- Get trained! Send GSA members and leaders/potential leaders to the Leadership Trainings co-sponsored by the Texas GSA Network in your area. Encourage the next year's leaders to apply to the GSA Activist Camp (held in the Summer).
- Plan a mini-retreat for the beginning of the school year or over the summer to develop relationships among your club's current and incoming leaders, build momentum for the next year, and give older leaders a chance to debrief and offer advice.
- Have current leaders keep clear and organized files, notes, and paperwork that they can pass along to new leaders.

## Decision Making in GSAs:

**In order to run effective meetings and get things done as a group, your Gay-Straight Alliance should designate a process for making decisions as an organization. Be sure to familiarize yourselves with school policy first; some schools require major decisions to be approved by the Student Council and/or Administration. Also, you need to decide what role your club's advisor will play in the decision-making process.**



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### Possible decision-making models include:

**Unanimous** -- A process called **consensus** is used to make sure everyone at the meeting agrees on the decision. See below for more info on how to reach consensus at your meetings.

**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).

**Hierarchy** -- club officers have ultimate decision-making power. This model may include further levels of decision-making power, such as Leaders-->President/Advisor-->Administration

### More About the Consensus Process:

Consensus-based decisions are achieved through discussion and must be approved by everyone at the meeting. A particular decision might be reshaped many times before consensus is reached. Groups that choose to use the consensus process often do so because voting on issues can divide membership and leave some people feeling unheard. Reaching consensus may also raise levels of commitment by group members because everyone is agreeing on a solution. The consensus-building process, however, requires time, discipline, and patience on the part of meeting participants, as well as a careful and attentive facilitator.

If your group is having trouble reaching consensus about a particular issue or question, try these tactics:

- Reword the consensus statement.
- Ask objectors to clearly state their feelings/reasons for objecting.
- See if the statement can be modified to accommodate the objection while still remaining acceptable to everyone else.
- Try to find consensus by asking, "**Can everyone live with this decision?**" This doesn't mean that everyone needs to be getting everything they want.

Although a very useful and often effective method for decision making, consensus is not possible or even applicable in every case. If you feel that the situation is irresolvable by consensus, don't be afraid to ask the group if everyone is willing to vote on it.



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# GAY/STRAIGHT ALLIANCES

## Legal Information:

### **Does a public school have to allow a Gay/Straight Alliance (GSA) to form at a high school or middle school?**

Under the **Equal Access Act (EAA)**, a federal law passed in 1984 that applies to all public secondary schools that receive federal funding, a secondary school that allows student-initiated non-curriculum-related clubs to meet on school groups during lunch or after school cannot deny other non-curricular student groups access to the school or otherwise discriminate against the group due to the content of the students proposed discussions.

As a federal judge concluded in an Equal Access Act case:

The Board Members may be uncomfortable about students discussing sexual orientation and how all students need to accept each other, whether gay or straight. . . . [But] Defendants cannot censor the student's speech to avoid discussions on campus that cause them discomfort or represent an unpopular viewpoint. In order to comply with the Equal Access Act, Anthony Colin, Heather Zeitin, and the members of the Gay-Straight Alliance must be permitted access to the school campus in the same way that the District provides access to all clubs, including the Christian Club and the Red Cross/Key Club.

### **Does the school have to give a GSA the same privileges as other clubs?**

Under the EAA, if a public school allows at least one non-curriculum related student group to use its facilities for a meeting place during non-instructional time, it cannot deny equal access or a fair opportunity to, or discriminate against any students who wish to conduct club meetings, such as a GSA. This means that the school must give the GSA the *same privileges* as other clubs, including access to such things as meetings spaces, bulletin boards, use of the PA system, etc. Failure to grant a GSA the same privileges may also **violate the Equal Protection Clause** of the federal or state constitutions, the First Amendment, and/or state statutes prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

### **Can the school require the club to change its name to something less divisive like the Tolerance Club or to broaden its mission statement?**

**No.** The group has first amendment speech and associational rights in its name and its mission. As one federal court explained: A group's speech and association rights are implicated in the name that it chooses for itself. The board is not allowed to require the student group to change its name merely because the Board finds that it would be less divisive. . . . [The students] testified that these name changes would attack the very core reason for having the club. . . . [One student] said that the use of the word "Gay" in the title is important to announce that "being gay or homosexual is not bad, it's who you are." . . . [Another student] said that taking the word gay out would take the focus away from the issues people face and would imply that



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there's something wrong with the word "gay." . . . For all of the reasons that [the students] mentioned when talking about being forced to change the club's name, the Board's suggested name change clearly infringes on profound expressive meaning that the group attaches to its name.

Moreover, as discussed above, once the Act has been triggered, a school cannot deny equal access or a fair opportunity to, or discriminate against a student club based on the content of the students proposed discussions. Requiring the club to change its name or mission statement based on the content of the name or the mission violates the Act's prohibition against discrimination.

### **Is a club "curriculum-related" simply because the school says it is?**

**No.** Whether a club is curriculum-related or not for purposes of the Act is a fact-based inquiry based on the connection between the subject matter of the group and the school's courses. The Supreme Court has defined a curriculum related group as one "that has more than just a tangential or attenuated relationship to the courses offered by the school. Examples of groups likely to be found curriculum related include: the French club, student government, and the school band. A non-curriculum related club, on the other hand, is one "that does not directly relate to the body of courses offered by the school. Examples of non curriculum-related clubs include the juggling club, the ski club, the scuba club, and the Christian club.

### **Is sexual orientation and perceived gender identity a protected class in Texas?**

Texas's nondiscrimination law does not explicitly address sexual orientation or gender identity discrimination. The following Texas cities have nondiscrimination ordinances in place for LGBTs: **Dallas Independent School District**

**The Texas Education Code**, Subtitle G, Chapter 37 was amended in 2005 to require independent school districts to establish a student code of conduct for the district. Section 37 requires that the policy address a prohibition on bullying, harassment, and hit lists. Harassment is defined as "threatening to cause harm or bodily injury to another student, engaging in sexually intimidating conduct, causing physical damage to the property of another student, subjecting another student to physical confinement or restraint, or maliciously taking any action that substantially harms another student's physical or emotional health or safety."



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# How to Facilitate a Meeting:

**What is a Facilitator?:** The facilitator is the person in charge of the meeting. They move the meeting along.

**The Facilitator is Responsible for:**

- Getting agreement on agenda and processes before and during the meeting
- Conducting the meeting - makes sure the group keeps to ground rules, time limits, etc.
- Guiding discussion
- Staying neutral, asking questions and suggesting ways to approach parts of the agenda
- Making sure the group comes to decisions and work is divided among members
- Keeping the group on track when they head off onto tangents
- Watching the vibe of the meeting and helping to keep energy up
- Making sure everyone participates and no one dominates
- Creating a safe and positive environment (protects people from personal attack)
- Intervening if problems come up, dealing with concerns
- Creating a comfortable environment - using language that makes everyone comfortable

**Strategies for Good Facilitation: (see the back of this sheet for specific things you can say during the meeting)**

- Ask person who put specific item on agenda to give a brief introduction on important background information and what they want done
- Give 5 minute warnings when moving on to another agenda item. Appoint a separate timekeeper if necessary.
- Put off “off-subject” topics - Create a list (a “parking lot”) for items to be discussed at another time
- Paraphrase (repeat back in your own words) to check for the sense of the discussion
- Help people avoid repeating themselves by summarizing discussion and asking only for comments in areas that haven’t been mentioned
- Make suggestions for how to move forward - after discussion has gone on for a while, try to summarize, look for agreement or sticking points, and come to decision
- Ask questions
- Be positive and encourage full participation - make sure everyone gets to speak, try to notice when someone is holding back
- Focus on issues, not personalities
- Ask someone else to facilitate if you want to actively participate in the discussion
- Check briefly for agreement before moving on - make sure everyone understands decisions

**Techniques for making decisions in meetings:**

- Brainstorming
- Prioritizing (ranking items)
- Pro’s and Con’s



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- Straw voting (informal poll to see where people are)
- Going around to everyone to check for the sense of the group

*This resource sheet was developed with help from CompassPoint Non-Profit Services*

## Fundraising for your GSA:

Here are some guidelines to follow and cool ideas to use when fundraising for your GSA. If your club has other good tips or ideas for raising money, let us know!

Become familiar with your school's system for financing student organizations. How do clubs set up bank accounts? Where will donations go? Who will donation checks be made out to? Who has the power to sign checks? Talk to other student leaders at your school, your advisor, and an administrator to get ideas and advice.

Explore the funding avenues at your school. Ask your advisor, or meet with the Dean of Students/Activities director to see if there are ways your club can get access to school funds or resources (such as photocopying and mailing).

Have GSA members do individual fundraising among relatives, family friends, co-workers, etc. See the back of this sheet for a sample donation request letter and a script to use when asking for money over the phone.

Engage in fundraising as a club activity. Have a bake sale or car wash - it's not very original, but it usually works. Or add your own twist - instead of selling just cookies, sell cookies with rainbow chocolate chips.

Sponsor a play, concert, or other cultural event to benefit your GSA. You might also consider donating part of the proceeds to a community organization or charity. Teamed up with your school's Drama Department to put on a play that deals with issues of homophobia and stereotyping in a school setting.

Get a local business to help you raise money by donating a portion of their profits (from a given block of time) to your GSA.

Look into community grant making programs. The following organizations/foundations have funding available for youth-initiated projects, and some have funded GSAs before:



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Be SPECIFIC about what you plan to do with the grant - what activities your group will do and how you will spend the money (research your budget and make it realistic!).

Be clear WHY you want to do the project described in your grant. For example, how will the project benefit your group? benefit your school? benefit others in the community? What is the effect your project will have? It is important to describe the activities you will do, but also explain why your group wants to do the project and why it is important.

Be YOURSELF. Don't try so hard to make your application sound "professional" that it doesn't sound like anything you would ever say. The people reviewing your application will usually be more impressed if you keep it real than by big words.

Be THOROUGH. Always double-check that you included all the information requested, whether it is filling in a form, writing on a separate sheet, or attaching a list, budget, or other info. When you are providing a phone number/address for a contact person, it is usually helpful to indicate if it is a youth or an adult, and to provide contact info for one of each.

## Asking for Donations:

### Sample Phone-Call Script:

Hi, May I please speak with \_\_\_\_\_? Hi, this is \_\_\_\_\_ calling. I wanted to talk to you about an organization I'm involved with at school, do you have a few minutes?

I'm a member of a student-run club at my school called the \_\_\_\_\_ *[Name of your GSA]*. We work to fight homophobia and anti-gay harassment in our school by educating our peers about sexual orientation issues and providing a safe space for queer youth and their allies.

Some of the projects and events we've sponsored in the past include: \_\_\_\_\_. This year, we'd like to \_\_\_\_\_ *[Examples: "Increase our visibility around school with posters," "Facilitate a teacher training about confronting homophobia in the classroom." Be specific about what kinds of programs your GSA is working on - make it clear to them what sorts of things their money will go toward.]*

We also have weekly meetings at school, where folks come to hang out, have a snack, plan events, and talk about issues in their lives. I'm calling to ask if you'd like to become a supporter of the \_\_\_\_\_ *[Name of your GSA]* by making a \$40\* donation to our club. *[pause and give them time to think - let them answer before you say anything]* \* Note: Ask for an amount that you think is appropriate.

### If Yes:

Great! Do you have a pen? You should make your check payable to: \_\_\_\_\_. You can send the check to: \_\_\_\_\_. *[Thank them.]*



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*[In a few days, call them to see if they've had a chance to mail the check yet.] If Maybe/Unsure: [If they can't afford the amount, ask if they would be able to donate half now and half next month. If they can't do that, ask them if they would like to make a smaller donation. Don't give up right away!]*

*[If they want to know more about the GSA, try to answer any questions they have and offer to send them GSA-related materials if you have any.]*

**If No:** *[Thank them for their time and move on to the next person. You can't win 'em all. You should expect as many as half of the people you ask to say no, that's normal. People have many reasons for saying no, don't assume it's personal.]*

**Sample letter:**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

For the past \_\_\_\_ months, I have been involved with a student-run club at my school called the \_\_\_\_\_ Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA). We work to fight homophobia and anti-gay harassment in our school by educating our peers about sexual orientation issues and providing a safe space for LGBTQ (lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender/questioning) youth and their allies. I am writing to ask you to donate \$40 [or other appropriate amount] to this organization to help make some of our upcoming projects possible.

Homophobia and harassment toward LGBTQ youth (and those who are perceived to be LGBTQ) is a very real problem in schools. In the Bay Area, violence against queer youth in schools has doubled in recent years. In many schools, students hear words or phrases such as "faggot" and "that's so gay" multiple times per day in the classroom. *[You may want to give specific examples from your school - If you've done a school survey, offer statistics from the results.]* \_\_\_\_\_ *[Name of your GSA]* was started to help make our school safer for LGBTQ students, teachers, staff by educating the school community about homophobia and sexual orientation issues.

I joined my school's GSA because *[talk about why you got involved and what you've learned/how it has helped you]* Some of the projects and events we've sponsored in the past include: \_\_\_\_\_. This year, we'd like to \_\_\_\_\_ *[Examples: "Increase our visibility around school with posters," "Facilitate a teacher training about confronting homophobia in the classroom." Be specific about what kinds of programs your GSA is working on - make it clear to them what sorts of things their money will go toward.]* We also have weekly meetings at school, where folks come to hang out, have a snack, plan events, and talk about issues in their lives.

We can't continue this important work without the support of individuals who really believe in what we're doing to fight homophobia in our school and make it safer.

Thank you,

P.S. If you have other questions about the \_\_\_\_\_ GSA, please call me at:

\_\_\_\_\_.

**NOTE: If you send a letter, it is very important to do follow-up phone calls about a week later. This will increase your success in getting donations.**



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## How to Plan an Event:

### **Work Plan**

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

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

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

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

### **Strategies**

#### **Advertising:**

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

#### **Co-Sponsorship:**

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



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## **Accessibility**

### **Space/Location:**

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

### **Hearing Impaired:**

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

### **Language:**

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

## Coalition Building:

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

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

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

What would your unifying issue(s) be?

What resources could come from this organization?

What obstacles might you encounter?

### **Guidelines for successful coalition-building:**

**1. Choose unifying issues.** The most effective coalitions come together around a common issue. Make sure the development of group goals is a joint process, rather than one or two group representatives deciding the goals and then inviting others to join.



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**2. Understand and respect each group's self interest.** There must be a balance between the goals and needs of the coalition and of the individual organizations.

**3. Respect each group's internal process.** It is important to understand and respect the differences among groups. These differences are often apparent in processes or chains of command for decision-making. Make a commitment to learning about the unique values, history, interests, structure, and agenda of the other groups and organizations.

**4. Agree to disagree.**

**5. Structure decision-making carefully.**

**6. Distribute credit fairly.** Recognize that contributions vary. Appreciate different contributions. Each organization will have something different to offer. Each one is important, so be sure to acknowledge them all, whether they be volunteers, meeting space, funding, copying, publicity, leafleting, passing resolutions, or other resources.

**7. Give and Take.** It is important to build on existing relationships and connections with other organizations. Don't just ask for or expect support; be prepared to give it.

**8. Develop a Common Strategy.** The strength of a coalition is in its unity. Work together with other organizations to develop a strategy that makes sense for everyone. The tactics you choose should be ones that all the organizations can endorse. If not, the tactics should be taken by individual organizations independent of the coalition.

**9. Be Strategic.** Building coalitions in and of themselves requires a good strategy. Which organizations you ask, who asks them, and what order to ask them are all questions to figure out.

**10. To ensure consistency, send the same representative to each coalition meeting.** This helps meetings run more smoothly. These individuals should also be decision-making members of the organizations they represent.

**11. Formalize Your Coalition.** It is best to make explicit agreements. Make sure everyone understands what their responsibilities and rights are. Being clear can help prevent conflicts.

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

## Building Anti-Racist GSAs:

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

#### **Educate the GSA.**

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

#### **Build Coalitions.**

Coalitions unite different organizations around a common issue, such as ending hate crimes at your school. Coalitions work together to organize campaigns and sponsor activities that help meet common goals. Consider having long-term coalitions with other diversity-focused groups at your school that encourage members to form personal as well as organizational



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relationships. This will help straight people of color become more familiar with the GSA and not force queer people of color to choose between one club activity or the other.

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

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

Host a diversity-themed film festival, poetry slam, or concert.

## Transgender Inclusivity in GSAs:

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

- 1. When your GSA asks for gender on a form or a survey don't have people mark either male or female.** Leave a blank line and allow people to write it in.
- 2. Don't separate your GSA into "boys" and "girls" for activities.**
- 3. As a GSA, watch and discuss movies with gender nonconformist characters.** Examples include Boys Don't Cry, My Life in Pink (Ma Vie en Rose), All About My Mother, Salmonberries, Just one of the Guys, Something Special, Priscilla Queen of the Desert. Consider hosting a screening of one of these movies as an educational event at your school, or design a curriculum for teachers to use if they show one of these films in class.
- 4. Bring in books and newspaper articles about people who are transgender. Talk about them in your GSA.**
- 5. Research statistics about transgender-related harassment and use them in your outreach & publicity materials.**
- 6. Be sure to include gender identity along with sexual orientation in your fight for inclusion in your school anti discrimination policies.**
- 7. Campaign to create a unisex bathroom at your school.** Write a proposal to the principal and the staff. Tell them you think that there should be one bathroom (that is not used very much,



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such as in the nurse's office) which is open to anyone. Let them understand that you want a safe space where a student of any sex, gender, or gender identity can change for a sport or use the bathroom and feel safe.

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

- Give everyone a chance to choose pictures of people out of magazines or books (ask them not to show anyone their picture). Ask everyone to describe the person without referring to the person's "privates" or using pronouns that we associate with a specific gender. Have each person read aloud their description and then have everyone "guess" the gender.

Here are a list of questions you can use for discussion when the "guessing" is done: Why did you associate some adjectives with men or women? Is something wrong with a person whose attributes are not considered normal for their gender? Why or why not? Can someone be both masculine and feminine and does that change their gender?

- Break everyone into small groups (or one-on-one if your group is small already) and give each person a bag of mixed jelly beans or M&M's (anything will work as long as they are the same size and shape and that they do vary in color). Tell each group to divide their bag up into two categories, using any criteria they can think of. Give people as much time as they need.

Here are some follow-up questions. How did you divide up the contents of the bag? Was it hard to think of criteria? Can some objects fit into both categories? If not, can you think of an instance when an object could? Or where one couldn't fit into either group? Do you think some people don't fit into one particular gender category? Do you think if someone has the body of a "man" and acts like a "woman" (or vice-versa) that they should alter their body or dress/style to fit the gender that they act like? Why or why not?

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

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

**\*\* These activities were designed by GSA Network Youth Council Member Max Cohen. If you wish to republish them, please contact CA GSA Network. ([www.gsanetwork.org](http://www.gsanetwork.org))**



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## Peer Education Workshops:

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

### **Ahead of Time:**

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

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

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

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

#### **Find a teacher.**

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

#### **Gauge the climate of the classroom.**

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

#### **Practice!**

### **In the Classroom:**

#### **Draw connections.**

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

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

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

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

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

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

Not everyone will be as versed as you in LGBTQ issues and language. You should define the terms you use, such as "sexual orientation" or gender identity," to make sure that everyone



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understands what you mean. If you decide to use words such as "queer" or "dyke," you should also discuss what they mean to you and why you are choosing to use them when others may not.

**Not everyone will agree with you.**

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

**Stick to your purpose**

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

**Be Honest.**

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

**Afterward:**

**Learn from your evaluations.**

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

***Sample Classroom Anti-Homophobia Workshop Agenda***

**I. INTRODUCTION (10 min)**

A. Personal introduction (name, age, what, why you're doing this workshop, etc.)

B. Purpose of Workshop

1. Increase awareness of the impact that anti-gay harassment and homophobia have on students at the school

2. Increase awareness of what homophobia is.

3. Create a safe space for people to ask questions about LGBTQ issues

4. Discuss how students can be better allies for LGBTQ people in schools.

C. Ground Rules/Agreements/Norms

1. Why is it important to have agreements? (So that people feel safe, comfortable and respected to say what's

on their minds, everyone gets heard...)

2. Put up Ground Rules: (let the class help generate these if you have time)

3. Read off each agreement and ask participants if there are any to add (if you already generated the list)

4. Ask everyone to agree to the Agreements/Norms/Ground Rules

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

A. Go over basic LGBT terms – (Remember not everyone will be comfortable with these and many won't be familiar with "transgender")

B. Ask for slang terms (you can discuss origins of the slang terms if you know them and have time)

C. Ask for stereotypes (if you have time)



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

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

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

- A. Explain that the presenters are going to share personal stories.
- B. Mention that these personal stories are not necessarily representative of every LGBTQ person's experience.
- C. At least one of the speakers should identify as LGBTQ, but straight allies with friends or family members can also share personal stories.

D. Each speaker gives a 5 minute highlight of their story, then allow 10 minutes to answer questions.  
Highlights:

When did you know you were gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender?

What is it like to be a bisexual, lesbian, gay or transgender youth in high school?

When you came out, were you supported by your friends? Family? Others?

What made it easier for you to come out?

If you are a straight ally, talk about your experience in relation to homophobia. How have you experienced homophobia because you have friends or family members who are LGBTQ? How does homophobia affect your friends and family members?

E. Ask for questions from the group.

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

A. Resource materials to hand out:

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

B. Ask the students to complete the evaluation.

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

*1. Consider making the panel discussion longer*

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

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

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

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



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# What Every Super-Rad Straight Ally Should Know:

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

## TEN WAYS HOMOPHOBIA AFFECTS STRAIGHT PEOPLE

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

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

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

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



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## Conducting a School Survey:

### Developing a school survey:

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

### Getting your survey approved:

- Show your GSA advisor a draft of your survey and ask for feedback.
- Find out how other surveys at your school are approved and follow the same process. For example, some surveys get approved by Student Leadership. At some schools, it is wise to get the approval and/or endorsement of the principal so that if you run into any trouble with certain teachers giving out the survey you'll have the principal's support behind you. Some schools have simply approached a department chair (e.g. Social Studies or English) to help you distribute the survey through teachers in their department.
- When seeking approval, be able to articulate why you want to conduct a survey, what you hope to get out of it, and how it can benefit the larger school community.
- Develop a feasible plan for conducting the survey. Think about getting a good cross-section of the student population.
- If you don't get approval to conduct the survey in classrooms, consider handing it out at lunch time. Offer an incentive such as candy or cookies so lots of students will be interested in participating, not just those who support the GSA already.

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

- If you use the survey on the back of this resource sheet without changing it, Texas GSA Network will analyze the data and send you a report of the findings, including graphs of responses. Send the surveys you collect to our statewide office: Texas GSA Network, 909 E. 49 1/2 St. Austin, TX 78721.
- Tally the results. Write up a report. Include the quantitative results for each question as well as the qualitative comments. You can also write a cover letter or introduction that gives background on why the survey was conducted and what major themes were discovered.
- Publish! Make a write up of why you did the survey, the results, quotes from respondents and submit it to your school newspaper or local city/town newspaper.
- Use survey stats to publicize your GSA meetings and raise visibility in your school through announcements, posters, and advertisements. Example: "72% of students surveyed at Austin



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High said that things need to change to make LGBTQ students safer here. Now DO SOMETHING! Create change! Come to the next GSA meeting, Wednesday at 3:00 in room 100. And bring a friend."

- Identify some of the major issues with your school environment as indicated by the survey results (ie. teachers don't intervene when homophobic comments are made in the classroom) and design projects to address them
- Consider formulating the results so as to compare answers between grade levels and/or males and females.
- Think about giving out another survey at a later date to measure if your school climate is changing.

Survey on page 30



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### School Climate Survey

Your responses to this survey will be kept confidential

Grade:  6  7  8  9  10  11  12

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

Sexual Orientation:

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

Race (check all that apply):

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

1. Have you had education about lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) issues at school (presentations, speakers, classroom discussions)?  yes  no  don't know
2. Do you know of any vandalism or graffiti being directed against students at your school because people think they are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT)?  yes  no  don't know
3. Do you know of any physical attacks occurring against students at your school because people think they are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT)?  yes  no  don't know
4. During the past 12 months, how many times on school property were you harassed or bullied because you are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender or someone thought you were?  4 or more times  2 to 3 times  1 time  0 times
5. How often do you hear anti-LGBT slurs directed at specific students, teachers, or staff?  several times a day  once a day  once a week  once a month or less  never
6. How often do you hear anti-LGBT slurs at school not specifically directed at an individual (example: "that's so gay" to mean something is bad)?  several times a day  once a day  once a week  once a month or less  never
- If you hear anti-LGBT slurs of any kind,
7. teachers or staff step in:  always  often  sometimes  never
8. you or other students step in:  always  often  sometimes  never
9. Do you know of students who openly identify as LGBT?  yes  no  don't know
10. Do you know of teachers or staff who openly identify as LGBT?  yes  no  don't know
11. If you wanted information and/or support about sexual orientation or gender identity, would you know where at school to go?  yes  no  don't know

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



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## Why Immigrant Rights is a Queer Issue

GSA's are a powerful tool to make your peers and community aware of oppression and discrimination in our society. Immigrants are discriminated against in many ways. But why is immigrant rights a queer issue?

Although maybe not obvious at first sight, immigrant rights and LGBTQ issues are closely connected. At the most basic level, there is a connection simply because many people share both identities. Thus they often face multiple discrimination, not only based on their immigrant status but also due to their being LGBTQ.

Both groups

- live under laws that say they are less human,
- are a scapegoat for society's problems,
- are afraid for the security of their families,
- feel vulnerable and unsafe because of policies, institutions and attitudes that keep them on the margins.

### Immigrants in the U.S.

The United States is a nation of immigrants and has always promoted itself as a country where everybody, no matter from where they are, gets a chance to live the "American Dream." With the exception of Native Americans, all of us are in this country as voluntary or involuntary immigrants or as the descendants of immigrants. Immigration has built the political, economic and cultural strength of this country from colonial days to the present. Yet, virtually every group of newcomers has faced discrimination, hostility and stereotyping from those already here. Particularly in times of economic difficulty or fear about "homeland security," immigrants are blamed for the problems of our society and are viewed with anger, suspicion and fear. Racial, religious and cultural prejudice have fueled hostility toward each wave of new immigrants.

The reasons immigrants come to the U.S. are manifold – to reunite with family, escape persecution in their country of origin, or to find better employment opportunities. In many cases, U.S. policies are responsible for devastating the economies of other countries, forcing workers from those countries to migrate to the U.S. just to be able to support their families, thus often separating them from their families for years. Meanwhile, corporations continue moving millions of jobs out of the U.S. in search of cheaper labor.

### Both LGBTQ people and immigrants are victims of injustice.

Did you know that:

- While U.S. citizens and their foreign heterosexual partners can easily claim spousal status and the immigrant rights that it brings, U.S. citizens with foreign lesbian or gay partners find that their relationship is considered non-existent under federal law. If they want to live together, they either have to leave the U.S. and move to another country or the foreign partner has to stay in the U.S. illegally.
- All immigrants, regardless of status, will pay on average \$80,000 per capita more in taxes than they



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use in government services over their lifetime. The Social Security system reaps the biggest windfall from taxes paid by immigrants who are not in a position to claim benefits.

- In 31 states of the U.S., it is legal to fire someone for being lesbian, gay, or bisexual; in 39 states, it is legal to fire someone because they are transgender.
- In some parts of the U.S., local ordinances order all public officials to check immigration papers — even teachers, nurses and librarians. They are forbidden to help anyone lacking them.

### What Can Your GSA Do to Fight for Immigrant Rights?

- 1. Discuss.** Bring in newspaper articles and books about (LGBTQ) immigrants. Discuss them in your GSA.
- 2. Get informed.** Look up information on immigration regulations regarding LGBTQ immigrants (see resources below). Compare them to regulations applying to heterosexual immigrants. Put your results on a poster!
- 3. Find out about cases of LGBTQ immigrants** (see resources below), like the case of Victoria Arellano. Create posters, flyers, etc. telling their stories.
- 4. Build coalitions.** This issue provides the opportunity to form coalitions with other student groups who work on issues around racism, human rights, etc.
- 5. Organize an event.** Invite a guest speaker (e.g. ask one of the organizations listed at the links section below), create a photo exhibition, make posters telling immigrants' stories. You can also use the workshop suggestions of Basic Rights Oregon or the Queer Immigrant Rights Project (see resources below).
- 6. Embrace cultural differences.** Just as you don't assume that heterosexuality is the norm, appreciate diversity and embrace all cultures without giving preference to the American culture.
- 7. Language is a common barrier** that students face at their school and immigrants face in their everyday life. Make sure your flyers are translated into multiple languages to reach a broader audience.

#### Resources:

##### Websites:

- Immigration Equality (formerly Lesbian Gay Immigration Rights Task Force) [www.immigrationequality.org](http://www.immigrationequality.org)
- Queer Immigrant Rights Project [www.quir.org](http://www.quir.org)
- Lambda Legal [www.lambdalegal.org/our-work/issues/immigration-and-asylum/](http://www.lambdalegal.org/our-work/issues/immigration-and-asylum/)
- NCLR Immigration Project [www.nclrights.org](http://www.nclrights.org)
- Human Rights Watch [www.hrw.org/reports/2006/us0506/index.htm#Report](http://www.hrw.org/reports/2006/us0506/index.htm#Report)
- Basic Rights Oregon [www.basicrights.org](http://www.basicrights.org)

#### Movies:

UNVEILED, Angelina Maccarone, dir. (2005). The story of an Iranian immigrant seeking asylum in Germany after being persecuted in her home country due to her lesbian relationship. But then she falls in love...

#### Cases:

- Victoria Arellano, 23, a Mexican transgender woman, died in the intensive care unit of a hospital in Los Angeles' San Pedro district. U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials detained the undocumented immigrant in May 2007 after she entered the country for the second time. Victoria, who was HIV-positive, died after she was denied medication by Immigration Enforcement officials.
- Chet, 67, and his Taiwanese partner Wei, 59, have been committed partners for two decades, during most of which Wei has lived in the U.S. undocumented: "We have lived together and been devoted to each other for the last twenty years and have tried every way possible to get him permanent resi-



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dence... Every possibility has been a dead end because of immigration laws against gay partners.”



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