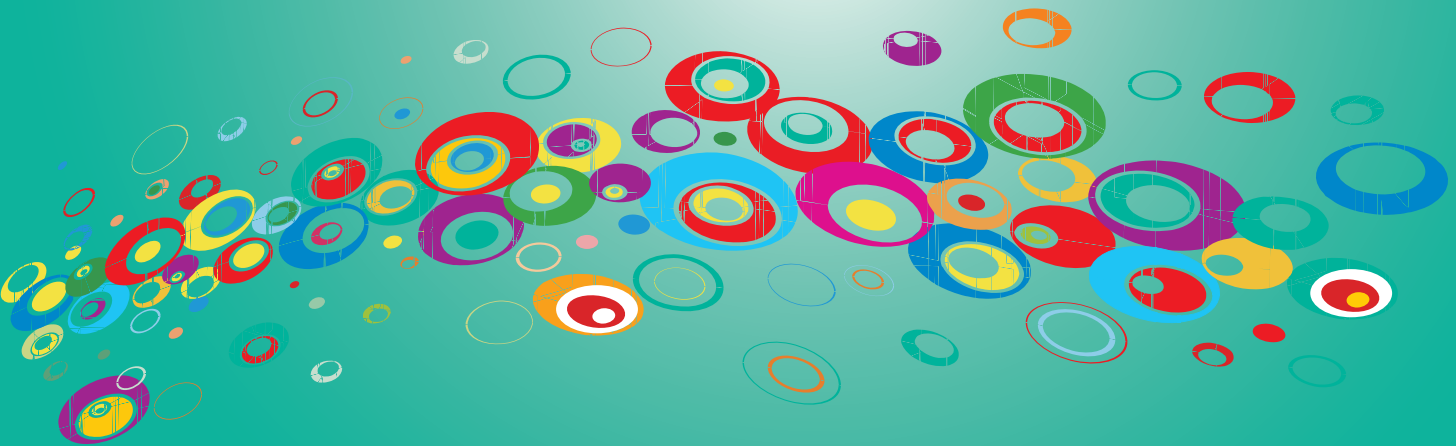


SO YOU WANNA START A  
**GSA?**



**A GENDER AND SEXUALITY ALLIANCE MANUAL**

Written by Romi Chandra Herbert  
and H el ene Frohard-Dourlent



Creating Supportive Communities For LGBT2Q+ Youth



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This manual was developed to enhance the resources available to LGBT2Q+ youth and supportive adults who are taking on leadership roles to create safer, more inclusive communities for LGBT2Q+ youth. The development of this manual was a community project and would not have been possible without the hard work, expertise and commitment of many supportive adult allies of LGBT2Q+ youth. Thank you for the passion and creativity that you bring to your role as GSA sponsors, youth workers, facilitators, teachers, counsellors and community members.

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## About C.A.L.L. Out!

C.A.L.L. Out! (Creating Action, Learning and Leadership) is a 2.5 year project that is active April 2014-September 2016 and funded by Health Canada's Drug Strategy Community Initiatives Fund. It is based out of Vancouver Coastal Health's Transgender Health Information Program in partnership with VCH Prism and VCH Youth Addiction Services. C.A.L.L. Out! strives to create safer, more inclusive communities for LGBT2Q+ youth across BC by building capacity amongst their community supports (school systems, health services, parents & caregivers and faith-based organizations) through education and peer mentorship. [www.vch.ca/callout](http://www.vch.ca/callout)

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**CALL Out!**  
Creating Supportive Communities For LGBT2Q+ Youth



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# GSAs – AN INTRODUCTION

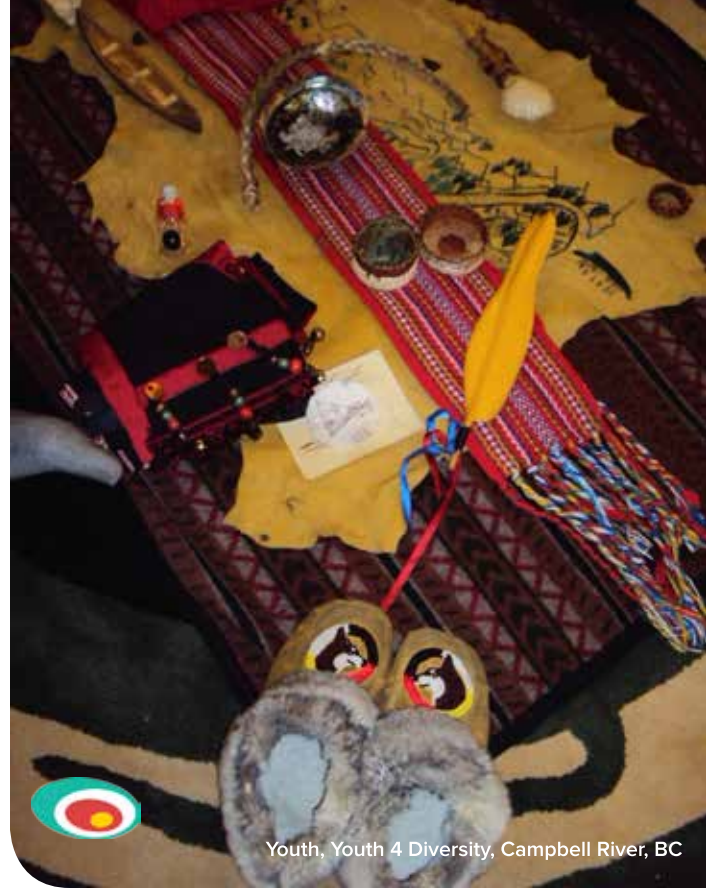
## What does GSA mean?

If you're reading this manual, chances are you've heard of a GSA before. The term GSA has traditionally stood for Gay/Straight Alliance, but, in order to be as inclusive as possible, some GSAs have begun using the description Gender and Sexuality Alliance, which is the description we're using throughout this manual (although, like many folks, we just shorten it to GSA). This way, the name no longer focuses on two identities but brings together people from all across the rainbow of gender and sexuality.

As a vibrant and diverse population, LGBTQ2Q+ communities evolve over time in the ways we refer to ourselves. Some like the terms “gay” or “lesbian” or “trans,” others find a sense of belonging in the word “queer.” As you'll see in this manual we can also turn some of our favourite terms that we identify with into an acronym such as the one we use at CALL Out!: LGBTQ2Q+ (which stands for lesbian, gay, bi, trans, Two-Spirit, queer/questioning). We think one of the most exciting parts of this acronym is the “+,” which we use as an acknowledgement of the vast array of gender and sexually diverse identities in our world! There are so many, and LGBTQ2Q+ communities have such a rich and constantly growing language for expressing our most fantastic selves! What words do you and the other people in your group like to use to describe themselves?

In this manual, we have also chosen the expression “queer and trans” as an umbrella term which can be inclusive of all people whose identities don't fit current norms of gender and sexuality. We recognize that this expression has its limits, but we like its simplicity. Sometimes, if we're referring to other sources or individuals, we'll use their preferred expressions or identities.

In your everyday life, we suggest that you pay close attention to the words people use to talk about themselves, so that you can use the words that feel most comfortable to the people around you. It's the best way to make sure you're being respectful of everyone's identities! If you are not sure about a word, check out our glossary for lots of definitions (Appendix A).



Youth, Youth 4 Diversity, Campbell River, BC

## What is a GSA?

Gender and Sexuality Alliances (GSAs) are groups that provide opportunities for students of all sexual orientations and gender identities to come together in a safe environment. GSAs focus on supporting one another, raising awareness about the issues faced by queer and trans people, and challenging discrimination based on gender identity and sexual orientation. A GSA can be peer-led by students, led by a GSA sponsor who is a supportive adult such as a teacher or youth worker or it can be co-facilitated by both a student and a GSA sponsor. We have written this manual for students who wish to run a peer-led GSA, but the concepts here can easily be applied by an adult GSA sponsor instead or by both a student and GSA sponsor.

A GSA can be action-oriented to create policy changes in schools and beyond, activity-based to keep the members of the group connected, or simply a place where members can share personal stories and experiences. It can also be all of these things at once!

Successful GSAs often incorporate a wide variety of activities to keep members interested, and also to engage with their community (see the list of activities for GSAs for ideas). GSAs are commonly found in schools, but they can be created in community spaces as well, including community centres, non-profit organizations, workplaces and libraries. While this guide focuses on creating GSAs in schools, what you will learn here can also be applied to GSAs in other spaces.





*Having worked in schools for close to 10 years, I have seen how GSAs have opened people's minds and hearts. I have seen reductions in youth/adults using expressions like "That's so gay" and youth supporting each other around their sexuality and gender no matter how they identified. I have witnessed GSAs create a climate of change where understanding, empathy and supportive recognition has been created and fostered.*

- Jean Fougère, SACY Youth Engagement Worker and GSA Sponsor, Vancouver BC



## Why do you need a GSA?

You might meet people who say, "Why do we need a GSA? We don't have a Straight Student Club." Of course, that's silly, because students who identify as straight and cisgender are also welcome to attend GSA meetings! For more information on being an ally to queer and trans folks, see Appendix B. GSAs are important to have in our schools and our communities because we often forget to include queer and trans people in everyday conversations and activities. You might have noticed that people often talk as if everyone was straight and as if trans people didn't exist, even though we know that queer and trans youth live in every community.<sup>1</sup> Because of these assumptions, queer and trans youth often experience isolation, marginalization and even harassment in their school and their community. The same can happen to any young person who doesn't fit our idea of what a 'boy' or a 'girl' should be.

But this doesn't have to be the case! Groups like GSAs can help create more inclusive schools and communities by creating a space where all genders and sexualities are welcome.<sup>2</sup> If the GSA is action-based, the group can also raise awareness about homophobia and transphobia, and create more visibility for sexual and gender diversity at their school. Research even suggests that in schools with established GSAs and policies to support the safety of queer and trans students, there are lower rates of some kinds of substance use, especially alcohol use, amongst all students.<sup>3</sup> The bottom line is:

### **Going to a school that is inclusive of sexual and gender diversity benefits everyone!**

There can be other advantages to having a GSA in your school, such as:

- new friendships
- schools putting their codes of conduct into practice
- schools establishing a sense of safety for students and teachers
- fewer incidences of name-calling and verbal harassment

- students receiving support, and increasing their capacity to offer support to each another
- students and teachers sharing their experiences, leading to greater knowledge and understanding
- students gaining skills in inclusive leadership
- students feeling that they can contribute to their community and have their voices heard
- parents feeling confident that there are safer places for their children to learn and grow

## First GSA in BC

The first GSA in a BC school was started in the suburban town of Maple Ridge in 1997 by one of the authors of this manual, Romi Chandra, who was a student there at the time. Before GSAs started developing in BC schools, queer and trans youth often had to leave their hometowns to seek support. This first GSA was created because teachers and students noticed that threats of homophobic violence were increasing in the school system. In order to attend the group, students had to meet with a school counsellor who would tell them the location of the meeting. Despite the good intentions of administration, this approach further marginalized students because it required them to reveal their reasons for attending the GSA.

When GSA members created posters and asked if they could put them up around the school, the principal and vice-principal denied them permission at first. The administration was concerned about reactions from parents if the group was promoted. Because this was the very first GSA in BC, journalists took an interest in the story and published articles about GSAs and the problem of homophobia in schools. This sparked debate and ultimately encouraged many teachers, students, and school districts to take action and help create more inclusive schools in BC. Today GSAs are thriving in many communities across the province, although there's still a lot of work to be done.



*These meetings were really challenging at times, because people opposed to the policy often used hurtful language, stereotypes and assumptions about queer and trans people when they spoke. Thankfully, the Vancouver School Board decided to approve the policy update to make schools more inclusive and protect all students from harassment. We are stronger when we work together: it was beautiful to go to these meetings and be met with a sea of rainbows and powerful signs advocating for gender-inclusive schools! This show of solidarity really helped us face some of the upsetting comments.*

- H  l  ne Frohard-Dourlent



To find out if your school district has a registered GSA, check out these websites:

- **Pride Education Network** - <http://www.pridenet.ca/gaystraight-alliances>
- **MyGSA.ca** - <http://www.mygsa.ca/gsas-canada>

## School District Policies

Many school districts across Canada have been adopting policies that guide how to make schools safer spaces for LGBT2Q+ students. These are often called anti-homophobia or trans inclusion policies. Not all school districts have an anti-homophobia or trans inclusion policy. These policies are created with the intent of creating a school environment where LGBT2Q+ students feel not only safe and included, but represented and encouraged to be themselves. Inclusion policies typically address the following:

- training for all school staff on what they can do to create safer schools for LGBT2Q+ students
- including LGBT2Q+ relevant information and materials in school curriculum (lesson plans etc)
- guidelines on how to deal with homophobic and transphobic bullying
- support for GSAs
- gender-inclusive washroom facilities for trans and gender diverse students

In 2014, the Vancouver School Board proposed an update to their 2004 Sexual Orientation policy to clarify how schools could support trans and gender-nonconforming students, renaming the policy “Sexual Orientation and Gender Identities.”<sup>4</sup> The School Board organized three public consultations to hear from people who supported as well as opposed this policy change. Hundreds of people came to these meetings, and H  l  ne, one of the authors of this manual, was there too!

Many people from local queer and trans communities (as well as lots of people working in solidarity with them as allies) attended the meetings and organized to encourage the Board to adopt this new trans-inclusive policy. All kinds of people spoke to advocate for trans and gender-

nonconforming students: youth, parents, local community organizers, health experts like doctors and psychologists, educators, as well as people who just wanted to show their support.

A large number of people also came to these meetings to express their concerns about and opposition to the policy update. It seemed that many opponents did not personally know trans and gender-nonconforming people, which may have contributed to misunderstanding of the policy. Some people said they were motivated by their faith, but it is important to remember that many faiths welcome people of all genders and sexualities.

Here is an excerpt from The Globe and Mail after the policy was passed: “Parents of transgender youth expressed relief Monday night after Vancouver School Board trustees voted seven-to-two to approve changes to the board’s sexual orientation and gender identities policy, a topic of incendiary debate. But the policy brings Vancouver in line with school districts in other Canadian centres.”<sup>5</sup>

Stories like this one are a good reminder that it is important to come together to advocate for queer and trans students and that change can be difficult work. Educating people about gender and sexual diversity can take time, and it requires patience, compassion, and understanding. Does your school have a policy to protect queer and trans students in your school? Does it explicitly talk about how schools can support trans and gender-nonconforming students?

If you’re not sure, you can find out if your district has a policy to support queer and trans youth on the website of the British Columbia Teachers’ Federation at <http://www.bctf.ca/SocialJustice> .

If you are looking for an example of a school district policy, check out the Vancouver School District Policy at the end of this manual (Appendix C). We’ve also included the British Columbia Teachers Federation (BCTF) policy (Appendix D). This policy outlines the roles and responsibilities of teachers in helping establish GSAs in the BC school system.



## By the Numbers – Some Statistics

This section summarizes a few things that research shows about the experiences of queer and trans youth.

First, we mentioned that queer and trans students can sometimes have a hard time in schools. Many studies have been done on this topic, and here is some of what they have found:

- In Canada, **70%** of all students reported hearing the expression “that’s so gay” **every day**. On top of that, **74%** of trans students, **55%** of queer students and **26%** of students who do not identify as queer or trans have been **verbally harassed about their gender expression**.<sup>6</sup>

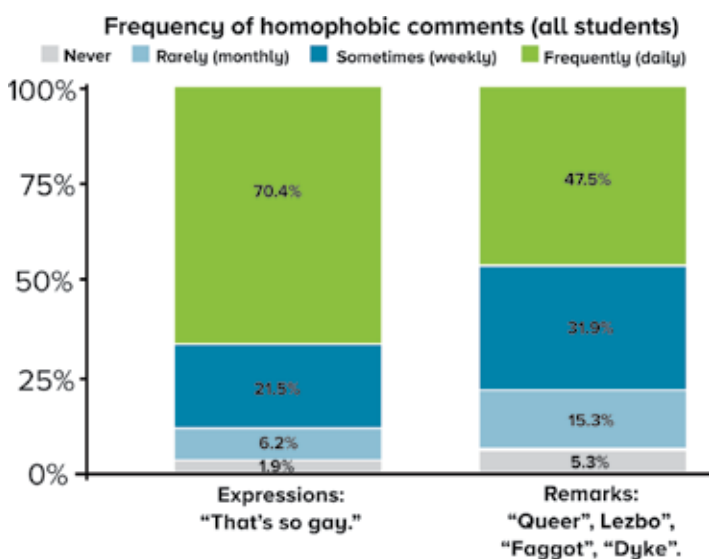


Figure 1. Taylor, C. & Peter, T., with McMinn, T.L., Elliott, T., Beldom, S., Ferry, A., Gross, Z., Poquin, S., & Schochter, K. (2011). Every class in every school: The first national climate survey on homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia in Canadian schools. Final report. Toronto, ON: Egale Canada Human Rights Trust, pg. 48.

- Queer and trans students also face physical harassment. **20%** of queer and trans students and almost **10%** of students who do not identify as queer or trans reported being **physically harassed** or assaulted about their perceived sexual orientation or gender identity.<sup>7</sup>
- A study in BC found that almost **two thirds** (64%) of queer and trans students report that they **feel unsafe** at school. Gender-segregated spaces like **change rooms and washrooms** are most likely to be **identified as unsafe spaces** by queer and trans youth.<sup>8</sup>
- Because of these negative experiences, queer and trans youth are at higher risk for health-compromising behaviours such as smoking, drinking or other substance use. These behaviours are often a **coping mechanism** for dealing with **isolation and marginalization**. Queer and trans youth are also more likely to report emotional stress, suicidal thoughts, and suicide attempts.<sup>9</sup>

These numbers are important because they remind us that even today, school can be hard places for young people who are marginalized because of their gender identity or sexual orientation. That said, queer and trans youth are not simply victims who experience harassment! Many queer and trans youth **thrive and live happy, healthy lives**, often showing amazing **resilience** in the face of schools that are not as inclusive as they could be.

Studies have also shown that **supportive schools and supportive adults** make a very positive difference in the lives of queer and trans youth. Here are a few examples from the research:

- In schools with anti-homophobia policies, students are less likely to hear homophobic (and, to a lesser extent, transphobic) comments, **less likely to be the target of harassment**, and less likely to identify certain spaces in their school as unsafe.<sup>10</sup>
- Students who attend schools with long-standing GSAs and anti-homophobia policies are **less likely to engage in heavy drinking**.<sup>11</sup>
- Family acceptance improves the chances that queer and trans youth will have **good physical and mental health**.<sup>12</sup> Trans youth with supportive families are more likely to **have high self-esteem** and to be satisfied with life, and less likely to experience depression and suicidal ideation.<sup>13</sup>

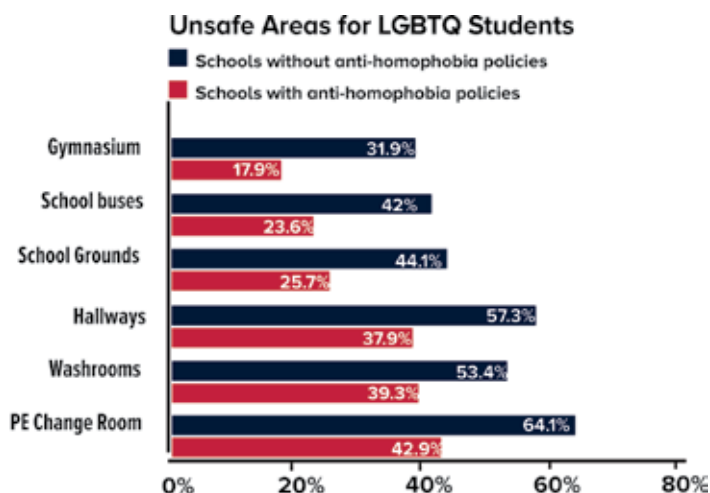


Figure 27. Taylor, C. & Peter, T., with McMinn, T.L., Elliott, T., Beldom, S., Ferry, A., Gross, Z., Poquin, S., & Schochter, K. (2011). Every class in every school: The first national climate survey on homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia in Canadian schools. Final report. Toronto, ON: Egale Canada Human Rights Trust, pg. 119.

GSAs can play an important part in fostering these relationships, especially within schools, and they can create a sense of community and support that fosters amazing forms of resilience for queer and trans youth.







Starting a GSA can involve many people who take responsibility for creating a strong group. You can work with community resources, support your school in becoming more inclusive of gender and sexual diversity, and maybe even help your school district be more inclusive! It's hard work but the rewards are incredibly worth it. You will gain valuable lifelong skills and make some new friends and connections.

Together you will make positive contributions to your school and your community by raising awareness about gender and sexual diversity, and by creating safer spaces for all students.

### So let's get started!

*There has been a lot more mainstream acceptance in our school with our club and we have had a few in-school gender transitions happen in the most recent years. People in our school have become more educated and accepting. We notice a lot less homophobic comments in the hallway.*

- CHAT Member, CHAT (Challenging Homophobia At Thompson), David Thompson Secondary, Vancouver BC



## PEER SUPPORT

We mentioned that a GSA is often a peer-led or peer co-facilitated group, built on the principles of peer support. Some peer-led groups focus on education and information, while others centre on emotional support and sharing, and yet others offer a opportunities to socialize and form friendships. Each group forms and changes according to the needs of its members. **Participation in a peer-led group is always voluntary.**

Many peer-led groups use these same fundamental principles to guide their work and create meaningful connections between members of the group. A peer support approach helps us support each other both individually and together, and builds healthy communities for everyone! Below, you'll find some details about the principles of peer support that peer-led groups are based on, and some information on what these groups look like. Keep these details in mind as you discuss what you would like your GSA to look like. It is important for anyone in a peer support role to be sure that they have their own support and skill building opportunities in place. Groups like Peernet BC can provide resources around peer support skills and training. Their website address is <http://www.peernetbc.com>. Having a trusted adult GSA sponsor who can provide support to students who are peer facilitators and peer leaders is also a really important consideration.







Ria Dubois, Safe Spaces, Kamloops, BC



## Key principles of peer support

### Sharing equal status

People in a peer-led group have come together because they share a common experience, so all members are on equal footing. Everyone's input is valued, and all members share a responsibility to keep the group going.

### Giving and receiving

In a peer-led group, each individual receives support, but also offers it to other people. This type of give-and-take participation enhances confidence and self-esteem by allowing each person to help others at the same that they are accepting help.

### Knowing from experience

People are experts on their own lives. Peer support recognizes and values the knowledge, emotional insights and understanding that people can gain from sharing their experiences, and from hearing the stories of other people.

### Respecting accessibility needs

Peer-led groups are free or involve a minimal contribution to help cover basic costs, so that money is not a barrier. Group facilitators should also think about other accessibility needs that group members might have, such as an accessible or

gender-inclusive washroom. The goal is to create a group that everyone has an opportunity to participate in if they wish.

## What can you expect from a peer-led group?

### A peer support approach:

- Validates people's experiences.
- Reduces isolation.
- Provides opportunities to give and receive support.
- Fosters connections and a social support network.

### Peer-led groups do NOT:

- Advise others on how to address their problems. Each person should have the opportunity to find their own way forward.
- Take away the problem. Group members share stories, strategies, activities and information.
- Replace the professional forms of support, therapy, treatment or assistance that people might need.
- Help people who have chosen not to participate in the group, or people who require support beyond the ability of the group members.
- Support everyone through every kind of problem. Peer-led groups are focused on a specific shared experience.





Peer-led groups can also have different **leadership structures**. For example, the group may operate by consensus, or by voting. Maybe the group has a leader or coordinator, or maybe leadership tasks rotate between members. Sometimes, teachers or other professionals are involved in getting the group started, but it's important for group members to have responsibility for the group and what it looks like.

### The facilitator's role

The facilitator of a peer-led group can be anyone who has experience with group facilitation. For example, a GSA could be led by teachers or by students, but a co-facilitation model between a teacher and student may be ideal to make sure that the group can keep going over time.

#### In general, facilitators have three responsibilities:

- Helping group members share their knowledge and insights with each other.
- Making sure that everyone has a chance to express their ideas and feelings.
- Maintaining a safe and respectful group environment where everyone feels valued.

If the group is action-oriented, it is also the role of the facilitator to keep the discussion on topic, so that the group can accomplish its goals (whether that's organizing an event, writing a proposal, etc.).

In a group that's well-facilitated, **everyone feels like they can contribute** and their input is valued. This creates trust and generates wonderful conversation!

### Three qualities of effective facilitators

#### 1. Respect

- Recognize the right of each member to have their own perspective and be heard.
- Remain open to positions that differ from your own.
- Believe in everyone's ability to grow and change
- Honour everyone's choices.

#### 2. Genuineness

- Make sure your beliefs about respect are reflected in your actions.
- Be attentive to your own feelings, values, thoughts and unresolved issues. They might have an impact on other members of the group.
- Be aware of your own limits. It's important to set clear personal boundaries.

#### 3. Positive attitude

- Welcome everyone to each group meeting with warmth and kindness.
- Accept each individual as a valuable member of the group.
- Acknowledge and celebrate each person's strengths.
- Provide feedback that focuses on observations rather than judgments.

Now that you know the principles of peer support and you have a sense of how to apply them to your GSA, let's get to the juicy stuff! The next section outlines how you can get your GSA started in six easy steps.





# HOW TO SET UP A GSA IN 6 EASY STEPS

## STEP 1: Do your homework

**Search** online and through your local paper, library or local community organizations to see if other GSAs or similar groups already exist in your area.

**Contact existing groups** to find out what is working and not working. Talk to students who are attending these groups, and also to the GSA sponsor teachers: they might have different insights for you.

**Talk to supportive adults** who have access to resources, such as teachers, parents, or workers at community organizations that are welcoming to queer and trans people. These people may also know other youth who want to participate in your group.

**Go online** to find as much information as you can about GSAs. For example, [myGSA.ca](http://myGSA.ca) is a website with great resources for GSAs.

**Get other students and supportive teachers involved.** Peer support means not doing it alone! If finding a teacher to sponsor the GSA in your school is difficult, don't be discouraged. Keep talking about why it's important to have a GSA, and eventually a supportive teacher will step up. Talk to an administrator about school policies for student clubs and let them know about your plan. It's important for your school administration to understand the importance of the GSA so that they can support you in getting it started.

## STEP 2: Work out details with a planning committee

Gather a small group of people who are interested in being involved in the GSA. This will be the planning committee, and together you can come up with a plan on how to make a GSA happen at your school. You can usually set up a GSA in the same way you would any other club or group in your school, but in some school districts, students need permission from the administration to start a GSA.

**Include a sponsor teacher in your planning committee if possible.** They will have information on available resources and where you can get funds for GSA activities (such as workshops or guest speakers), they can help you navigate your school's policies and procedures to get the group

*We have had great support from students, teachers and administration. Our superintendent came to one games night and tries to come to regular meetings.*

- Christine Danroth, District Helping Teacher for SD 52 and GSA Sponsor, Prince Rupert BC

started, and they will help you with your goal of creating safer spaces in your school.

Meet once or several times with the planning committee to work on a detailed plan for what your GSA will be like, and why it's important to have a GSA at your school. Here are some things to consider:

### Peer support

Since GSAs are peer-led groups, it's a good idea to talk with the planning committee about what the concept of peer support means to them, and how you're planning on putting the principles of peer support into practice when you start the GSA. If people are not familiar with the concept of peer support, use this manual as a starting point for your conversation.

### Hopes for the group

What does everyone hope to get from the group? What can you do to incorporate people's hopes into the group itself? This will likely get revisited during your first GSA meeting(s), once you get a larger number of members involved, but it's good to have a starting point.

### Mission of the group

What kind of group do you want to create? Not all GSAs look the same, and your group gets to decide what it will look like! Here are some examples of mission statements for GSAs that we created:

- Is it a group dedicated to **being a social space** – for people to have fun, hang out, chat? **Example of mission statement:** The Harry Jerome High School 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.
- Is it a group that **engages in activism** – for people to organize, create change, take action? **Example of mission statement:** The David Suzuki High School GSA brings together queer, trans and straight



students to fight homophobia and transphobia in our school and in the community. By raising awareness about sexual and gender diversity, linking homophobia/transphobia with other forms of oppression, and advocating for equal treatment for all youth, our GSA will help create a school environment free of homophobic and transphobic violence.

- Is it a group that **provides support** – for people to talk about what’s on their minds? **Example of mission statement:** The Catherine White Holman High School welcomes all lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, questioning and straight youth to come and talk about any issues concerning them. Peer support is our main objective and members can bring up personal issues they are facing. By using one-on-one and group discussion, we hope to create a safe place to offer support, resources and social connection.

Your mission can be a combination of all of these types of groups. Your mission may also change as more people start attending the meeting, and that’s OK! Don’t hesitate to update this statement on a regular basis so that it stays relevant to the group.

### Facilitation

Will group members take turns facilitating meetings, or will there be one facilitator, or will you choose two co-facilitators? You might want to think about having different students take turn facilitating the group’s discussions. It’s a great way for people to gain confidence and develop their skills as a facilitator. Think about the diversity of the co-facilitators, for example by making sure co-facilitators come from a variety of backgrounds and aren’t best friends. It will help show GSA members that everyone is welcome in the space.

### Structure

Will you designate a couple of student leaders? What role will the teacher or GSA sponsor play? Do you want a set agenda for each meeting or will the group be more informal?

### Membership

Can anyone join? Can people who are interested (but don’t come to meetings) be members? Can people drop in? We encourage you to make it as easy as possible for people to be part of the GSA, to make sure that the group stays accessible to everyone who needs it.

It is also worth taking some time with the planning committee to think about what you could do to make sure that the GSA is an inclusive space for people who have experienced

marginalization within queer spaces. For example, did you know that 57% of two-spirit people report feeling unsafe revealing their identity in the broader queer community?<sup>14</sup> It is a good idea to think about how the GSA can make specific efforts to be inclusive of students of colour, indigenous students, or trans students, especially if you don’t belong to one of these groups, and even if these students are not present in your group at first. A simple example for being inclusive of trans students could be asking everyone to state their pronoun (she/he/they/ze/etc.) at the beginning of every GSA meeting. This way, if someone would like to start using different pronoun, or if a new member uses pronouns different from what people might assume, you’ve already made space for them and they won’t have to ask.

### Resource people

Who are some resource people for the group at the school? What about in the community? It can be helpful to create a list of people or organizations that can help you with your group on an ongoing basis, so that you don’t have to look them up every time you might need their help. For example, your list might have the contact for queer and trans friendly youth workers, the Trans Lifeline (1-877-330-6366), or your local crisis line.

### Action plan

What needs to be done to get the group started? Who will do what? A clear action plan will help you stay on track in-between planning meetings.

## STEP 3: Consider Logistics

It’s important to have a good idea of how your GSA will operate before you start promoting the group to the whole school. Make sure you meet with the planning committee to figure out the following details:

### Cost

A GSA is a volunteer-based group that can run without any funding, or cost to participate. Some GSAs take on big projects that require some funds. There are a number of organizations and funding agencies who might be able to provide money for your GSA projects. For example, the Pride Education Network offers bursaries to GSAs (<http://pridenet.ca/>). A sponsor teacher can help identify those sources and apply for funding.

### Location

Where will your meeting take place? Is the location in a safe and secure area of the school, but not so private that participants are made to feel awkward going there? Is it difficult to find the entrance or room?





## Accessibility

Is the space set up to welcome people with disabilities? Are there gender-inclusive washrooms nearby?

Suitability: Does the location have any uncomfortable associations for members? Will there be other activities occurring in the space during GSA meetings? If so, are these other activities going to get in the way of what you want the GSA to be like?

## Ambience

Is the space cozy and inviting? What kind of lighting does it have? Some people are highly sensitive to certain types of light and/or smells. Do you have supplies you'll need regularly, like white-board markers, or food?

Functionality: Is there access to equipment (e.g. TV, video/DVD machine, projector)? Is the space big enough or small enough to accommodate the activities you're planning for the group?

## Time

When will the meeting take place? It is impossible to have everyone attend all meetings. Choose a time that works well for core group members and work from there.

Frequency & duration: How often will the meetings be? How long will they last?

## Outside GSA meetings

How will you accommodate for someone who needs extra support beyond the meeting? It's a good idea to identify one or two supportive adults (at your school or in the community) who can provide additional support to a student who needs it.

## STEP 4: Get the word out

Format: How will you promote the group? At first, when you're just getting started, you could rely on word-of-mouth, but it's a good idea to let others at your school or in the community know that a GSA is happening in your school. This way, youth who have been feeling isolated can join you.

## Help from supportive adults and school staff

Letting your school counsellor or youth worker and other staff know about your GSA can be useful, as they may know young people who would benefit from joining the GSA. Your school counsellor (or the administration) may also be able to spread information about the GSA to school staff.

## Public announcements

Are you able to advertise your group through your school's PA system? If so, include the date, location, and time. Explain briefly why students should join and share the contact

*One thing that shifted was that the GSA became seen as another 'club' at the school rather than a covert group of students. The club was just a representation of a different group within the school community. We have a table at "clubs' day" where new recruits are signed up just like any other club in the school.*

- J. Mark, GSA Sponsor, Vancouver



information of the sponsor teacher, in case someone wants more details before going to a meeting. Some schools have a newsletter or newspaper. Can you make an announcement for the GSA there?

*Some schools try to restrict advertising the location of meeting for fear that students who attend GSA meetings might be targeted. Instead students have to ask a teacher of the location. This is a barrier that can prevent some students from accessing the GSA. If GSA students are getting harassed, the school should address this problem without making the GSA less visible.*

## Posters & social media

Create GSA posters with all the necessary information for someone who might be interested in attending a meeting. Get permission from your teacher and the administration before putting up the posters in key locations across your school. You can also create a public GSA Facebook page, a Tumblr blog, or any other social media website to advertise upcoming events and discussion topics.

## ABOUT SOCIAL MEDIA

**Being a part of social media can be challenging for some folks as it may 'out' them and/or expose them to cyber-bullying. If you do decide to use social media, don't add people to the group – let them add themselves. Have a discussion with your GSA about what are good things to post and not to post on social media. Social media can be a great tool to connect with other GSAs around the province and learn about upcoming events and to generate even more ideas of activities you can do in your GSA.**



## Calendar of events

This may be more relevant once your group has been meeting for a while, or it may be helpful in getting other youth interested right away by giving them a specific activity to look forward to! You can create an event calendar to keep track of and advertise upcoming meetings and events with posters or announcements. If you focus on a different discussion topic every week, advertise the theme of your next meeting. Let people know what you're doing – it will get them interested in attending meetings or events!

## Registering your GSA

There are a couple of organizations that help keep track of existing GSAs. It is a good idea to register your GSA on these websites so that students who are going to your school or will be going to your school can easily find out about the GSA, and so that other GSAs can easily contact you if they want to organize an event together or need advice.

- Pride Education Network is a network of supportive teachers, parents, and community organizations across BC who have come together to offer additional support to those wanting to create safer schools for all students. You can register your group with this network by going to their website at [pridenet.ca](http://pridenet.ca) or by sending an email [info@pridenet.ca](mailto:info@pridenet.ca)
- You can also add your GSA to the website [MyGSA.ca/gsas-canada](http://MyGSA.ca/gsas-canada). They also have a space where you can share your stories about starting a GSA. You can talk about challenges that you are facing, successes you've had, or ideas for activities to do with a GSA.

## STEP 5: Start the Group

Once you are done with planning, it's time to have your first group meeting! Try to have all the members of the planning group involved in that first meeting, so that they can model peer support. Make sure to keep a balance between presenting the plans already created with the planning committee, and being receptive to ideas from newcomers: it's important that everyone feels comfortable contributing to the group.

See the next section on how to run your first meeting successfully!

## STEP 6: Checking in

After your GSA has started meeting on a regular basis, check in with people who have been attending to see how they think the group is doing and what changes you might make as a result of the first meeting(s). Checking in or assessing the group gives everyone an opportunity to share their impressions and to take ownership of the GSA.

**Thinking ahead:** During one of your meetings, ask members to reflect on how they would like to evaluate the group.

How will you know that the GSA is successful and that the members are happy with the group? Evaluating your GSA helps make sure that it is **meeting the expectations of its members**, and it can also be useful to have evidence that the GSA is accomplishing amazing things (whether that's providing a safer space for students, or organizing events) to share with your school's administration or your school district.

**Evaluation:** Check in with GSA members and do a group "climate check" once in a while (it could be every few weeks or every few months). What's working well and what isn't? Make it clear what you're seeking feedback about (your facilitation style, the group in general, activities you've done?). You can also choose to gather written feedback. People might feel safer sharing negative feedback if it is anonymous and they're not worried about others judging them. See Appendix E for a sample feedback form.

You can adjust what the group is doing based on people's responses. It's always good to receive feedback, the good and not so good, in order to improve our work.

## Founder's Syndrome

When someone creates a GSA, it's because they're passionate about social justice and creating safer spaces in our schools. This passion is what makes GSAs happen in the first place! Sometimes this passion can translate to "Founder's Syndrome," where the founder(s) of the GSA end up holding a lot of the decision-making power and influence over the group. This might make it hard for the group to keep going once these people graduate or move on to other projects. What steps will you take to make sure that new members are ready to share the tasks and responsibilities necessary to keep the group going?

## Congratulate each other

You have successfully started a new peer-led group in your school, which means there's now a bit more space for gender and sexual diversity. This is worth celebrating!

Now you have the foundations for getting your GSA started. The next section of this manual outlines in detail how you can prepare for the first meeting of your GSA, and gives you some ideas for how you can run that first meeting to get people excited about the new group.



# YOUR FIRST GSA MEETING

## Planning for the first meeting

Here are a few things that are helpful to discuss ahead of the first official GSA meeting:

- **Welcoming ritual:** Who will welcome people at meetings? A warm welcome is a good way to help people feel included and comfortable in the space, and it will make it more likely that they will attend another meeting.
- **Agenda:** If you want the first meeting to be structured so that you have a chance to introduce how it will work to new people, make sure that you prepare an agenda ahead of time (see Appendix F).
- **Icebreakers & team building:** There are lots of good books and online resources about activities that help build connections within a group. Doing these team-building activities may be especially important at the beginning when you are trying to create a supportive environment where people are comfortable with each other. We have included a list of potential ice breakers at the end of this manual (Appendix G) to give you some ideas.
- **Facilitation:** Who will start the meeting and how will it be run? How will people be introduced? Who will outline the agenda? Who will lead activities?
- **Inclusion:** If you have a large group, it might be a good idea to give people a chance to talk with the person next to them or in smaller groups. It helps people who are new and/or a little shy feel included, and it will build trust amongst GSA members.
- **Territory acknowledgment:** If you (and other members of the planning committee) don't have an Indigenous background, it is important that you learn how to recognize which territory your school and your community are in. This kind of acknowledgement is important because First Nations communities in B.C. never ceded (this means giving away the right to something) their land. We have included a sample territory acknowledgement in Appendix F. For a list of Traditional Territories across B.C. so you can figure out what territory you live on, please see the BCTF Aboriginal Education Program resource: <https://www.bctf.ca/uploadedFiles/public/AboutUs/ServicesHandbook/1AbEdProgram.pdf>

## Facilitating the first meeting

### Introductions

Once everyone has arrived for the meeting, start with introductions. You can talk a bit about why you have decided to start a GSA, followed by an opportunity for everyone to

say a little bit about themselves. Ask people to introduce themselves with their names and their pronouns (for example, they, she, ze, or he), and maybe to answer a silly question to help to get to know each other (if you could be any type of noodle or pasta, what would you be?). **Never ask people to identify their sexual orientation or gender identity – people will share this information with the group if they want to, as they get comfortable.**

Most importantly, this round of introductions will **give you a chance to learn everyone's names and pronouns.** Remembering this information is really important to make sure that people feel respected and welcome at the GSA. Don't be surprised if someone chooses to introduce themselves by a different name or pronoun than you would have expected. Even though it might seem repetitive after a while, it's a good idea to start every GSA meeting with a round of introductions. It helps get to know each other, and it makes it easy to integrate newcomers into the group since they have a chance to introduce themselves and hear from everyone else. This kind of check-in is also a good way to give everyone a chance to speak and maybe say a bit about how they're feeling that day. Something else that can be valuable about regular check-ins is that if there is someone who wants to try out a new name or pronoun and wants to let others know, they can do that safely!

### Guidelines

Another important part of a first GSA meeting is to establish some guidelines that will inform how the group is run, and how group members will interact with each other. Invite discussion from everyone who's there about what the group guidelines will be. Remember that an effective peer-led group involves input and ideas from all participants. Some questions that you might want to discuss with the group:

- How will the guidelines be communicated to members (a poster in the room where the GSA meets, a reminder at the beginning of each meeting)?
- How will cultural and other differences be addressed?
- How will members be supported to make sure that they adhere to group guidelines?
- What if someone breaches a guideline — how will it be approached, and by whom?

Here are some guidelines that you can consider for your GSA:

- **Confidentiality:** What is shared in this space stays in this space. This guideline is important to make room for people who want to talk about sexual and gender diversity at the GSA, but may not be ready or want to have this conversation with other people



in the school. Discuss how members should interact with each other outside of GSA meetings, in the school or out in the community. For example, some people might not want others to know that they are a member of the GSA.

- **Don't yuck my yum:** We all have things we like and dislike, but the GSA isn't the space to criticize someone else's likes or dislikes. You want to celebrate diversity in every aspect of the lives of GSA members!
- **Respect people's pronouns:** Some people might want to use different pronouns during GSA meetings, or they might want to use different pronouns from one week to the next. It's important to always use the correct pronouns for someone. It might be tricky for some people at first, and it's OK to slip up as long as you correct yourself and keep going. It becomes easier with practice.
- **Be mindful of your language and behaviour:** Think about whether what you're doing or saying might be oppressive to others. The GSA should be a safer space for all students, which means that everyone should be attentive to words and actions that are connected to histories and experiences of racism, ageism, classism, sexism, transphobia, homophobia, ableism, or sizeism.
- **Consent is mandatory:** No touching another person without their consent.
- **One person talks at a time:** It makes conversations with a big group much easier!
- **No gossiping** about people who are or are not a part of the GSA.
- **Welcoming space:** Be welcoming to all members so that cliques don't form within the GSA. This would further isolate people who are at GSA meetings to make new friends.
- **Rules of attraction:** In order to create a space where everyone is equal, the peer facilitators or leaders of the GSA will not be dating group members. If some GSA members choose to form romantic relationships with each other, they should pay attention to the impact it might have on the group and/or in our community.
- **Drug- and alcohol-free space:** GSA members should not be under the influence of drugs or alcohol when attending meetings. (You may be running your GSA in a low-barrier community setting where some youth may be struggling with substance use, in which case, apply the same norms to this group as you would to any other group your organization runs.)

### What will our GSA look like?

Since GSAs are based on a peer support model, it is important to explain to everyone attending the first meeting(s) that everyone's input and involvement is valued. Have an open discussion about the goals for the GSA where everyone can share their perspective. You can ask the following questions to get the conversation started:

- What do you hope to get from the GSA?
- What issue or concern brought you here?
- What would you like this GSA to focus on (support, activism, providing a social space)?

You might want to write down the goals that you set so that it is easy to go back to them when you're evaluating how your GSA is doing. The goals that you set during the first meeting(s) are not set in stone, but they will give you some direction and help plan for the future. As we've mentioned, it's important to leave room for the group to change over time as people's needs shift and as new people join.

This is also a good time to have a conversation about the leadership of the group. Although it is important to value everyone's input in a peer-led group, it can be useful to designate a small number of people to be the organizing committee/co-presidents of the group. It helps to have people who are taking notes on what the group wants to do, making sure that tasks are assigned, etc. GSA leaders can be anyone – they don't have to be the people who helped found the GSA.

Finally, take advantage of this first meeting to figure out what people would like the group to look like. Do they prefer a GSA that's very structured (with a detailed agenda every meeting), or would they like to be able to just get together and chat about whatever is on their mind that day? Make sure that there's space for people to share their experiences and any question they might have, and that there's time to be social and get to know each other!

### The practical stuff

It's a good idea to talk about some more practical details during your first meeting. Ask who's interested in doing what, and divide up tasks so that one person doesn't have to be in charge of everything. Some things that are worth thinking about:

- How will you communicate about meeting dates and times? Do you need people's contact information for other reasons? Will there be a contact list for the group?







- If there's going to be food and refreshments at your GSA meetings, who's going to make/buy it? Where will the money come from? Who will be in charge of set-up and clean-up?
- Will support be available between meetings? In what form? Who will be responsible for providing this support?
- Where will the group's resources be kept, and who will have access to them in between meetings? Is anyone in charge of gathering more resources?
- Who will be in charge of arranging room bookings, writing thank-you letters to guest speakers or replying to inquiries made to the group?
- Respect the space and people's time by ending the meeting on time.

Don't worry if you don't end up talking about everything during your very first meeting. There's a lot to cover! And it's not all up to you: how quickly you can reach decisions varies a lot depending on who's in your group, how different people's expectations are, and how much they like to chat. Even if these conversations take a while, that's OK – you're already building supportive relationships between members, and that's a big part of why GSAs are so valuable.

You might want to keep a scrapbook from the beginning to record what the group is doing. It's a wonderful way to show new members what you do and also a great record of how much you've accomplished!



# WHAT CAN OUR GSA DO? IDEAS FOR YOUR MEETINGS!

## Brainstorming activities

In a strong GSA, all the members are involved in brainstorming ideas for future GSA meetings and events. You can brainstorm ideas with your group as your GSA is just getting started, but remember to do it again every few months to engage GSA members (especially people who are new). Once you have come up with a lot of ideas, you can ask members to rank their favourite activities so that you have something specific to focus on.

Remember to delegate! Ask GSA members to help organize some of these events or lead some of the meetings. When you involve participants from the very beginning, they're more likely to attend future meetings and bring friends to the group, as they'll feel invested in the group and how it's doing. They're also more likely to contribute ideas for new things that the GSA can do.

## Planning discussion topics

For many members, GSA meetings are a great opportunity to get together with other people who are interested in gender and sexual diversity and to talk about lots of different things! If your GSA is primarily a space for discussion, here are some examples of topics you could explore:

**coming out, supporting family, sexual health, substance use, safety in queer spaces, queer history, trans history, making the school more inclusive, safe and unsafe school areas, allyship, anti-oppression, supportive teachers and administration, community resources, supporting straight and cisgender students in learning about gender and sexual diversity**

Sometimes, a great way to get a discussion going is to put together a workshop on a certain topic. We've included examples of workshop outlines at the end of the manual (Appendix H). You can use them as a guide to create your own workshop - be creative, be challenging, and most of all, be inclusive!

## Bringing in guest speakers

In many communities, there are organizations who offer training, workshops and activities on a wide variety of topics

*We had a great opportunity to fundraise for QMUNITY by having a booth at the Magee Market Fair. We sold crafts and candy. The exposure was great, and lots of people learned that Magee is queer-friendly.*

- Airdrie Miller, GSA Sponsor,  
Magee Secondary School, Vancouver BC



that GSA members may want to learn more about. Invite guest speakers from these organizations to present to your GSA! Some organizations may charge for workshops, but you can seek funding from your school, host fundraisers, or simply ask the organization if they can waive the fee or if they're willing to barter (for example, exchange volunteer hours for a workshop). Most organizations will not turn you away.

Before bringing in guest speakers, ask if they can **customize their workshop to meet the needs of your GSA** based on the level of knowledge of GSA members, what they want to learn about, and what they're hoping to do with this new information. For example, if you're hoping to learn more queer history so that you can do an art project in your school, let the guest speakers know! They may be able to adapt their workshop to help you with your ideas and give you some guidance on how to be successful with your project. You can also ask for an outline of the workshop or for a sample of feedback from previous workshop participants to help you decide if this guest speaker is a good fit for your GSA.

If there aren't a lot of community organizations where you live, or if they don't offer the services you are looking for, keep in mind that there are also provincial organizations that can travel to your school from outside your community. Go online to find these resources, and/or ask supportive adults to help you locate them.

One important aspect to ensuring guest speakers bring a positive contribution to your group is making sure that they are at least somewhat knowledgeable on issues facing LGBT2Q+ youth and are able to interact with them in a positive and respectful way. This is something you can either ask an adult GSA sponsor in assisting you with or have them take on for the group by meeting with guest speakers ahead of time to ensure they've got the basics, like respecting people's pronouns and using inclusive language. Feel free to provide potential guest speakers with a copy of this manual to give them an idea of what your group is all about!

## School-wide projects

Some discussions and guest speakers may inspire your group to want to take action beyond the GSA. This can be a





great opportunity to use the energy of your group to create some positive change at your school! For example, you could help make future school events more queer- and trans-inclusive, you could create displays to make gender and sexual diversity more visible at your school, or you could talk to your school board about implementing queer- and trans-inclusive policies.

Before doing a school-wide project, **make sure your group has a good understanding of the issues that you want to address.** For example, if you're looking to do a school-wide activity to encourage other students at your school to reflect on how they can be more active allies, make sure you've done a workshop in your GSA to learn more about the many forms that allyship can take.

This is especially important if you're planning on organizing an event that focuses on folks who have historically been marginalized in the queer community. For example, if you're thinking of organizing a workshop about the trans community, **it is important to involve people from that community and include their voices in the planning process.** Or if you are doing an activity during Black History Month where you are connecting queer identities and issues of race, make sure that your GSA has done some training on this topic before taking on a school-wide project. If possible, include students who are from these communities in a significant way, and **be willing to listen to their suggestions.** This is where you get to practice what allyship looks like when working with communities that you may not belong to.

## MOST COMMON FEARS ABOUT RUNNING A GSA

### You're not good at facilitating GSA meetings

If you don't have much experience with facilitation, it might be challenging at first to lead GSA meetings. Have an agenda to help you stay on track, and lead the meetings in a way that feels right to you (a sample can be found in Appendix F). People will respond better if they sense you're being genuine rather trying to force yourself to do things a certain way because you feel like you have to. Facilitation gets easier the more you do it, as you find your own style!

At the beginning, it might be best if you have a co-facilitator (it could be another student or the GSA sponsor teacher). Split tasks so that you're not doing all the work yourself, and start with leading the activities you're most comfortable with.



Ria Dubois, Safe Spaces, Kamloops, BC

*Low attendance is one major challenge; that said, the students who do participate are very, very grateful and active for the group. We have tried to attract members with pizza parties and a mini-film-festival.*  
- Airdrie Miller, GSA Sponsor, Magee Secondary School, Vancouver BC

You might also want to get anonymous written feedback from GSA members on how the group is being facilitated: it will give you ideas on how to strengthen your practice and your group (a sample can be found in Appendix E).

In addition to this guide, there might be trainings available in your community so you can get some additional practice with facilitation. But remember – GSAs are meant to be co-facilitated groups so the group isn't your sole responsibility. Get other people involved and it will take some of the pressure off.

### No one or few people show up at your meeting

Given the amount of time and effort that you have put into getting a GSA started, it might be discouraging if not many people seem interested in attending. Don't give up! There are lots of reasons why only a few people might be coming at first: it takes a while for people to warm up to new ideas, some people might be working up the courage to attend a meeting, others might not have heard about the group, and others still might have other groups they committed to before the GSA started.

Adapt your goals to the number of people who are attending. There are some activities that work well, even better, when only a small number of people are involved. And even if one or two people are showing up, this group is making a difference for them!

Finally, you can brainstorm with your group or your sponsor teacher to figure out why this may be happening and to think of possible ideas to bring in new members. Different strategies will work in different schools.



## Posters keep being torn down

The good news is that people are noticing and reading your posters. Don't be discouraged – make extra copies and put them up again!

**Every time this happens, document it (record the date, location and approximate time the poster was torn down) then report it to your sponsor teacher and your school administration.** They

need to know that there is some resistance, because this alone is evidence that the GSA is needed, and that discrimination against gender and sexual diversity is well and alive at your school.

This might also be a good opportunity for teachers and administrators to make it clear to everyone at the school that they support the GSA and that they are willing to advocate on behalf of queer and trans students. People might be less likely to tear down posters if they know you have the backing of most adults at the school.

If you encounter resistance from your administrators about putting up the posters advertising for the GSA, ask them why and how they would like to proceed so that both of you can get your needs met (you have the posters put up and their concerns are addressed). Your sponsor teacher can help you advocate on the behalf of the GSA.

## Group is taken over and direction of group changed

Sometimes this happens when people forget the original reason why the group was set up. But sometimes that's not a bad thing – maybe things have changed at your school, and it's time for a new direction. However, it's important that **all group members be consulted** so that they can find that new direction together, so that no one feels excluded.

*The only challenge I have faced working with a GSA was pushback from one teacher. He did not agree with “you people” being so open in a school setting. He was responsible for removing posters from the foyer and common areas of our school. As a group, we went to administration and school staff, who we knew were supporters of our GSA. The response was tremendous! Administration emailed all staff expressing deep concern over the issue and reminding everyone that our school was a safe place for everyone. This ignited teachers and staff to share the concerns with the students who then rallied behind the GSA.*

*The art classes made multiple posters to replace posters that could replace torn down posters quickly. Everyone in the school kept an eye on our posters and school staff put posters/rainbow stickers on their doors and in their classrooms. Instead of bringing down a group/school, the misguided actions of one person inspired most everyone to stand together and support each other.*

*It was very inspirational and moving for all involved especially those who were members of the GSA.*

- Jean Fougère, SACY Youth Engagement Worker and GSA Sponsor, Vancouver BC

There may be times where there is a push (from teachers and students) for the group to have a name that doesn't mention gender and sexuality, for example the “Diversity Club,” and for the group to be a space to talk about all kinds of issues. This could be for a few reasons: LGBT2Q+ students may feel that attending the group “outs” them to other students — one way to address this is to be sure that your promotional materials state that this space is welcoming for allies as well as LGBT2Q+ youth — that way no one feels a need to identify themselves as LGBT2Q+ if they don't want to. Another reason may be that students in the group would also like space to focus on social justice issues beyond the LGBT2Q+ communities — this is great! One thing to keep in mind though, is ensuring that LGBT2Q+ students are still being consistently included, celebrated and represented in group activities.

However, some people who are pushing for this change may be demonstrating that they are a little uncomfortable with addressing queer and trans

issues, or that they are unaware of the specific issues faced by queer and trans students. Work with the people who are asking for this change to address their concerns and explain why it is important to keep the group focused on creating safe space for queer and trans students. If this type of push is coming from the sponsor teacher, perhaps another teacher at your school would be better fit for the GSA.

## Facing resistance from teachers or administrators

You might find that not all teachers and administrators are supportive of the GSA, especially at the beginning. If you are facing resistance, find supportive teachers and other students who can help you advocate for the GSA and explain why having this group is important. If necessary, you can also ask





for help from supportive parents or community organizations. **Meet with people and brainstorm where the resistance is coming from, and what you might be able to do to overcome it.** It might also be helpful to document what unsupportive people are telling you, so that you can report it to supportive adults and talk about how to address these comments.

If the lack of support is preventing you from running the GSA, arrange a meeting with whoever is expressing resistance. Explain what GSAs are about and why they're important (going back to review the first section of this manual could be helpful here), and see if you can answer their concerns, or if they're willing to help you solve the problems that they've identified.

If the person is not willing to help you, chances are that their resistance is more about their personal belief system than anything else. This is much harder to solve, and it shouldn't take up too much of your time and energy. Your energy is needed to run your group and create a safer space at your school. If this person is preventing you from starting the GSA at all, it might be time to get supportive adults involved in the conversation. Community organizations can sometimes also help you advocate for the GSA.

**Below are some examples of resistant comments you might hear, and some ideas about what you could say in response.**

**“Parents will not be ok with this”:**

If you are following your school's code of conduct, **no one has the right to stop you from starting a GSA in your school.** In fact, teachers are encouraged to support GSAs in all BC schools. You can read more about the British Columbia Teacher's Federation policy in the appendix section.

**“We don't have enough staff or the resources to support this group”:**

As long as you can identify a space in the school where you can hold your meetings, you should be able to run a GSA. If your school struggles to provide funds for events/snacks, there are some organizations (such as the Pride Education Network) that offer bursaries for GSAs.

**“There is already another group that is similar to this”:**

Explain what is specific about the GSA, and that it's important to have a group dedicated to queer and trans students, since they often face higher rates of discrimination and harassment in schools. You can cite the studies we mentioned earlier.

**“We don't have any queer students in our school”:**

That's probably not true: **queer (and trans) youth are found in all grades, in rural and urban areas, and in all ethnic groups in BC schools.**<sup>15</sup> Even if it was true, GSAs make schools more inclusive for all students – remember, even straight and cisgender students can be targeted by homophobia and transphobia

**“Homophobia is not a problem in our school”:**

Without revealing anyone's identity, give some anecdotal evidence of homophobia and transphobia that you've noticed in your school; it's especially powerful if you're drawing on the experiences of multiple students, as long as everyone has given you permission to use their stories. You can also point out the ways in which gender and sexual diversity is invisible in your school and how this might contribute to students not feeling safe to be out.

**“Of all the years I've been here, no one as had any concerns”:**

You could point out that **many people don't speak up about these issues because they're afraid that they won't be taken seriously or that people at their school won't be supportive** of a club focused on queer and trans students. The fact that you're here and you want to start this club is proof that people have concerns. It's never too late to do something about it!

## Facing resistance from parents

In some school communities, some parents may not be supportive of the GSA and might try to stop the GSA from starting. If possible, try to have supportive parents address the concerns of other parents, as this will often be more effective. You can also ask your sponsor teacher and/or your school administration to talk to parents and explain why it is important to have a GSA at your school.

**Here are a few things you might hear from resistant parents, and some ideas for what you could say in response:**

**“We want our children to learn about these issues at home and not in schools”:**

The two are not mutually exclusive. It's great for parents to have conversations with their children about the importance of respecting all differences, including gender and sexual diversity because it makes it much more likely that children will take these messages seriously. But not all parents do this, and schools have a responsibility to be safe for all youth who attend. The GSA helps create a safer space for students who need it, and no one is forced to attend.





### “What about parents’ rights?”:

The rights of parents doesn’t trump the fact that all children deserve to feel safe at school. The GSA is about creating safer schools that are inclusive of everyone.

### “Why are we focusing on one specific group?”:

**Homophobia and transphobia can affect everyone** in schools, so all students benefit from a GSA that encourages inclusivity and acceptance at the school.

### “We don’t want to promote one lifestyle over another”:

Being queer and trans is no more a lifestyle than being straight or cisgender, and you can’t make someone queer or trans! More importantly, GSAs aren’t about promoting being queer and trans. They’re about making the school a place that is more welcoming to queer and trans students because they usually encounter more discrimination and harassment.

### “This GSA will single out those students and make things even harder for them”:

The GSA is open to all students, not just those who are queer and trans, so it doesn’t single anyone out. And **if students are being harassed – that’s the fault of the people who are doing the harassing, not the fault of the GSA.**

### “Kids are too young to explore these topics, they’re not ready for this”:

If students are old enough to use derogatory words against each other, they are old enough to know how these words impact other students and the school community.

## Sponsor teacher controls the group too much

When adults are involved in a project, they can have the (well-meaning) tendency to take charge of the group and

not leave much room for student leadership. To prevent this, work on the agenda for the GSA with the sponsor teacher and assign roles and tasks. This way, they will know what their role is during the meetings. Adults in a GSA are there to support students, and to help them carry out projects that students have decided on.

If a teacher is not sure what their role is, the BCTF policy in Appendix D might help guide them. They could also talk to other GSA sponsors about how they’ve supported students in a GSA. Finally, there are plenty of resources available for adults to learn more about effective youth engagement, including the Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement. You can find their website at: <http://www.engagementcentre.ca/>

## Sustainability of the group –passing on the leadership

It’s important to know when it’s time to pass on the leadership of the GSA to someone new. You may have new projects going, or maybe you’re graduating. It’s time to take care of yourself and ensure that the GSA can continue to run smoothly after you’re gone.

If someone is interested in becoming the leader of the GSA, **start working with them early so they have time to learn the necessary skills.** Get them to co-facilitate meetings with you, assist you in any other regular tasks you have to do, and introduce the new leader to anyone with whom you’re in frequent contact about the GSA.

A number of GSAs come to an end because the group hadn’t planned on who would lead the group the next year, so be proactive! It’s wonderful to see a project that you started continue beyond your time.



# ACTIVITIES FOR YOUR GSA

Leading a GSA can be challenging, especially at first, because there's so much to do! To help you get started, we've created a list of areas to focus on in order to build the best GSA possible. You can use these ideas as starting points when you're brainstorming with GSA members about what you'd like to do.

We've divided ideas into the 6 colours of the rainbow flag:

- The **red section** provides ideas for personal growth for GSA leaders/facilitators;
- The **orange section** provides ideas for strengthening your GSA group;
- The **yellow section** provides ideas for bringing in outside resources;
- The **green section** provides ideas for supporting your school;
- The **blue section** provides ideas for supporting your school district;
- The **purple section** provides ideas for celebrating special days (for example, Trans Day of Remembrance or International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia).

## Red = Ideas for personal growth for GSA leaders/facilitators

Being a good facilitator takes a lot of practice. It also means continuously working to improve your skills by learning about a wide range of topics that could come up in the discussions you help facilitate.

**Practicing facilitation skills just means doing it!** Give people who want to gain some facilitation skills a chance to lead a GSA meeting, or a smaller activity to start. You can pair up people with different levels of facilitation experience to make it less scary to jump into facilitation! Another idea is to practice each leading a different icebreaker from Appendix G every time you have a meeting, or to **rotate who is leading different parts of the meeting each week**. You can also sit down with other people who have experience with facilitating the meetings and share your experience and questions – hearing how other people have dealt with facilitation issues is a great way to be prepared if they ever come up.

Another way to improve your facilitation skills is to **attend specific trainings that focus on how to lead group discussions more effectively**. You might also want to think

about workshops that will focus on your personal growth by deepening your understanding of anti-oppression and social justice issues (including racism, classism, ageism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, sizeism/body image, transphobia, allyship, queer history, First Nations history, and the intersections between all these issues). Other topics you could keep an eye out for: group communication and conflict, community/youth/school engagement, inclusive leadership, team-building, safety and boundaries within peer-led groups, power dynamics, group problem solving and decision-making.

Youth-focused organizations are likely to offer these trainings, so this is another opportunity to put your online searching skills to task! Ask your sponsor teacher or other supportive teachers who run courses on leadership, social justice, or Planning 10, for their ideas and help locating workshops. Finally, be in touch with any contact you might have at local organizations. Even if they don't offer these kinds of training themselves, they will probably have an idea of other organizations that do.

You could coordinate with other schools in your district about this type of training. Contact other GSAs in your area if there are any, and ask whether there are training topics that their leaders may be interested in attending with you.

Another great way to receive additional training is get involved and volunteer for an organization in your community. This organization may be addressing different issues or working on a project unrelated to your GSA, but the learning that you will do with them can often be applied to your GSA.

## Orange = Ideas for strengthening your GSA group

During the first few GSA meetings, students will be curious about who is in the space. They will probably be interested in getting to know each other, and it may also be important for members of the group to build trust in each other if you're hoping to have more meaningful conversations during your meetings. **Remember to check in with your members about what they feel is the best way to strengthen the group** and help people get to know each other. Brainstorm ideas with them for what the GSA can do.

One possibility is to do **ice-breakers and team building activities** as well as some leadership-based activities - we've included some ideas in Appendix G. There are also plenty of manuals available online, for example:

- The Neonology Guide from the North Shore Multicultural Society: <http://nsms.ca/nsms-publications/>





*Our GSA has been really successful with a board game night on Sundays. We order pizza and have refreshments. We have teamed up with our local civic centre. We have a volunteer (adult) who has joined the group and it's been HUGE to our success. We also have a Facebook page called The Prince Rupert Gay Straight Alliance. It's a great way to reach everyone and talk about upcoming events and post pictures and activities.*

- Christine Danroth, District Helping Teacher for SD 52 and GSA Sponsor, Prince Rupert BC



- The toolkit from the Youth Action Network: [http://peacefulschoolsinternational.org/wp-content/uploads/fireitup\\_youthactivismmanual.pdf](http://peacefulschoolsinternational.org/wp-content/uploads/fireitup_youthactivismmanual.pdf)

Sometimes people also come to GSA meetings to learn from each other's stories. To facilitate this, create opportunities for participants to share their experiences. Discussion topics can include:

- Who do you consider to be your role model(s) and why?
- What are the issues facing LGBT2Q+ students at your school? How can the GSA get involved to address these problems?
- What areas of your school do you consider to be safe? Why? What areas are unsafe? Why?
- What challenges exist within the queer community? What do racism, sexism, classism, ageism, ableism, transphobia look like in the queer community?
- What's the appropriate way to respond to someone who's harassing you because of your gender identity, gender expression, or sexual orientation?
- What are some good ways to come out to people you care about?
- How do students experience harassment online? How do you maintain your physical and emotional safety while supporting others online?

When you're leading a discussion about a topic that can be emotional for some, it is important not to explore these things too intensely or personally. GSAs are not therapy groups and need to be kept light enough! Think of it this way: **you're trying to have participants leave the GSA meeting feeling better and more resilient than when they walked in.** Try to keep heavy topics focused on group members' strengths and resources along with possible solutions and ideas for moving forward. If someone needs additional

support, be sure to check in with them after the group to help them figure out where to go with their concerns. It isn't rude to slow a conversation down if it is getting too intense and personal for the GSA setting. It can be a good idea to close a tough discussion by going around the group and giving everyone a chance to say something about what they can do to take care of their emotional well-being, or to overcome or some of the challenges identified through your discussion.

**There are more hands-on activities** that you could do with your GSA if they enjoy being creative. For example, you could create art or a zine based on your discussions, or you could do a photography project where you take pictures around your community and school and put them together into a larger display. You could even create a workshop to present in classrooms at your school.

You don't have to always focus on heavy subjects, either. **If your group is more active or more social, you could play board games or make meals together.** Go play outside! Throw a disc around, play softball or soccer... When everyone is respectful and having fun, sports can help build group cohesion. Building queer and trans community for yourself and for your school doesn't just mean talking about queer and trans issues. It can also be meeting up, having fun, and thriving together!

## Yellow = Ideas for bringing in outside resources

You can add value to your group and expand the knowledge of GSA members by turning to outside resources. It will also spark new conversations in your group!

This could be as simple as watching movies that feature queer and trans characters, or finding online videos that are relevant to the multiple experiences of queer and trans people. Your local library can be a great resource to find these movies or videos, and myGSA.ca also has lots of suggestions for you! Before showing any video to the GSA, view it in its entirety to make sure they are appropriate for showing at your school.

Another option is to bring in a guest speaker. Sometimes teachers will bring in guest speakers for a specific course, such as Social Justice 12. You can ask these teachers and guest speaker(s) if they would be open to coming to your GSA afterwards to talk to the group.

To decide on what guest speaker to invite, you can think about workshops that you've attended to enhance your leadership skills (see red section). If you found a topic or



workshop particularly inspiring or eye-opening, maybe your whole GSA would benefit from this knowledge! For example, you could bring someone in to talk about mental health, substance use, self-care in queer or trans communities, or someone who can share their personal experience. There are so many stories out there and hearing from people who are different from us encourages us to grow as people. You can also bring in speakers who can talk to your teachers about how to effectively challenge homophobic and transphobic language amongst staff and students, and about how to make your school culture more inclusive of gender and sexual diversity. There might be community or non-profit organizations in your area that can come to your school and lead workshops with adults.

## Green = Ideas for supporting your school

Once your group has gotten to know each other, and people are starting to feel safer and less isolated, you might think about **engaging the rest of your school to advocate for safety and inclusivity at a larger level.** Check in with your group – maybe only certain members want to be visible and organize school-wide projects. See the Inclusive Event Organizing Workshop in Appendix H for more hints on how to organize events!

Here are some ideas for projects your GSA could take on to help create a more inclusive school culture:

- Meet with the librarians at your school and order books and magazines that feature queer and trans people, and books written by queer and trans writers.
- Organize a school-wide campaign on gender-neutral pronouns, to expand knowledge of gender diversity.
- Create a social event (such as a queer- and trans-friendly dance) and invite the whole school.
- Organize a campaign that encourages people to be visible as allies. For example, you could have a table set-up and invite students and teachers sign a pledge (example: My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I will speak up against homophobic and transphobic language). With permission from the administration, you could have the pledges posted in the school to showcase these acts of allyship.
- Involve the choir or the band at your school to create a mini-concert highlighting queer and trans artists.
- Engage your administration to create gender-inclusive washrooms at your school.
- Make art celebrating sexual and gender diversity and showcase it at the library, in the hallways, or in the school office.

- Host an event or create posters recognizing important dates such as International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia (see purple section for events and dates).
- Host a fundraiser so that you can organize more events or raise money for a cause the GSA would like to support. A fundraiser could be a fashion show, a BBQ or picnic, a flea market sale, a bake sale, a swag sale (rainbow bracelets, Pride t-shirts, buttons celebrating gender and sexual diversity)... be creative!
- Find posters online that GSA members like, order them and have them posted throughout your school (with the permission of the school administration).
- Provide rainbow stickers to supportive teachers to put on their classroom doors.
- Have a conversation with the people who teach sexual education at your school to ensure the content is inclusive of queer and trans experiences and identities.
- Talk to PE teachers and coaches at your school to create athletic programs that are more inclusive for queer, trans and gender-nonconforming students (for example, are adults modeling inclusive language and behaviour, are there efforts to reduce gender-segregated teams?).
- Talk to all teachers in your school to ensure that they're using inclusive language in their classroom. Even math teachers can make a difference!

As you do this work, it is important to remember that **you and the GSA should never be solely in charge of making your school an inclusive place.** It is the professional responsibility of your school administration and your teachers to create a school culture that's inclusive of gender and sexual diversity by role-modelling inclusive language and behaviour.

*There is a pride flag hanging in our commons room – our GSA fought for an inclusive LGBTQ policy for our district, and we got it – and we helped to create a documentary entitled “Gender Blender,” which premiered at our local cinema and opened the community to discussions on LGBTQ issues! (This is HUGE for a small town like Hope.)*

- Erin Wilkins, Counsellor and Social Justice & Law 12 Teacher, Hope Secondary School



*The GSAs I have worked with have done many activities over the years to create better communities in and outside of our schools. One which stands out is our Tree of Empathy where students on The Day of Pink created huge trees in the foyers of our schools and wrote positive/supportive/caring messages on pink leaves and pasted them on the tree throughout the day. The messages were so moving and inspirational that the tree grew larger and larger taking over the whole foyer in each school. The students and staff wanted the tree to keep going and so instead of the tree lasting one day it was kept until the end of the school year, inspiring all members of the school and visitors who passed through the school's halls.*

- Jean Fougère, SACY Youth Engagement Worker and GSA/QSA Sponsor, Vancouver BC



## Blue = Ideas for supporting your school district

You may want to create change beyond your school, at the level of the school district. If your administration is not always a great champion for your GSA, pushing for a district-wide policy that explicitly protects queer and trans students might help convince your administration that it's important to support the GSA. Conversely, if your school has become a safer place, organizing at this higher level can help create more inclusive schools across the district.

### 1. District-wide policy.

Check the district's website or make a call to the board to find out if your district has a policy that supports queer and trans students. If it does, ask for a copy and bring it your GSA to see if any improvements can be made. Often, policies are explicit about protecting queer and trans students from harassment, but it may not discuss the importance of language and curriculum that's inclusive of sexual and gender diversity, or it may not have any guidelines on how schools can support trans students.

You can get ideas about what a supportive district policy looks like by reading at the Vancouver School District policy (Appendix C).

### 2. Collaborating with other GSAs

Get to know GSA members from other schools and **create a network between different schools.** Building connections with other GSAs means that you can turn to them for advice, for help organizing campaigns at your school, or just for fun! If other students are interested, you could even create a District GSA that meets on a regular basis to organize district-wide events, such as a film screening at a local community centre, or a story-sharing night at a local coffee shop.

## Purple = Ideas for celebrating special days

There are set dates throughout the year that are dedicated to particular topics or events. You can **use these dates to plan events and raise awareness within your GSA or more broadly at your school.** Your administration might be more willing to support you if they see that you are planning an event as part of a larger movement.

Below you'll find a list of some significant dates that you could use as an opportunity to plan an event or a workshop. Some of them might not seem like they're related to gender and sexuality at first, but they will give you a chance to explore the diversity of queer and trans lives. For example, you could bring a guest speaker to your GSA for National Aboriginal Day to talk about two-spirit identities and learn about how indigenous communities think about gender and sexual diversity.

If there's an event in the list you don't know, look it up online to learn more!

### January

Jan 27 - International Day of Commemoration in memory of the victims of the Holocaust

### February

All month - Black History Month  
Changing date - Pink Shirt Day in BC  
End of February - Freedom to Read Week

### March

Mar 8 - International Women's Day  
Mar 21 - International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

### April

Apr 9 - International Day of Pink  
Changing date - Day of Silence







# APPENDICES

## Appendix A:

### Glossary

**Note:** *This glossary is provided to offer increased clarity. All definitions have been adapted and developed from a variety of sources, including the 2011 Vancouver School Board resource “Questions & Answers for Parents and Family Members of Gender Variant and Transgender Youth” and QMUNITY’s “Queer Terminology- from A to Q.”*

**Ableism:** The belief that disabilities are necessarily unpleasant and distressing. Ableism is also a system that marginalizes people with disabilities by not taking their needs into account and wrongly assuming they are less capable than people who are able-bodied (this means not having a disability).

**Ageism:** The assumptions that someone has certain abilities based on their age. Often causes the perspectives of young people, as well as the perspective of old people, to be dismissed or forgotten, because both these groups are seen as less as less capable than middle-aged adults.

**Ally:** Someone who is not LGBT2Q+ but is supportive of and advocates for the rights and equality of LGBT2Q+ people. LGBT2Q+ people may be allies to trans people and vice versa.

**Asexual:** Someone who does not experience sexual desire for people of any gender. Some asexual people desire romantic relationships, while others do not. Asexuality can be considered a spectrum, with some asexual people experiencing desire for varying types of intimacy. This desire may fluctuate over time.

**Bisexual:** A person who is attracted to and may form sexual and romantic relationships with people of the same gender and with those of another gender. Historically this means men and women, however this is not always the case.

**Cisgender:** A person whose gender identity and expression matches the gender typically associated with their biological sex.

**Cissexism:** The assumption that everyone is cisgender, that this gender identity is natural and superior. Cissexism is much more pervasive and subtle than transphobia and can be seen daily in media and advertising.

**Classism:** The idea that people who are wealthier and have more formal education are superior to, and more capable than, people from a lower class. An example of classism is the false assumption that people are poor because they don’t work hard enough or aren’t as smart.

**Femme:** describes gender expressions and/or social and relationship roles that are perceived as being feminine, or refers to a person who embodies these qualities.

**Gay:** A person who is attracted to someone of the same sex and/or gender as themselves. This word can be applied to all genders of relationships, but has primarily been used in reference to men.

**Gender:** A socially constructed concept of identity based on roles, behaviours, activities, and appearance such as masculine, feminine, androgynous, etc.

**Gender binary:** The idea that there are only two genders (girls/women and boys/men) that are separate and unchanging. People who identify outside of the gender binary (such as people who are genderqueer) are said to have a non-binary gender identity.

**Gender expression:** The ways a person presents their sense of gender to others (for example, through clothes, hairstyle, mannerisms, etc.).

**Gender-fluid:** A gender identity that is changeable.

**Gender identity:** A person’s internal sense of being a man, a woman, genderqueer etc. This is not the same thing as a person’s biological sex, and may not be consistent with how they are perceived by others.

**Gender inclusive:** Refers to a place or practice that is inclusive of all gender identities. A gender inclusive restroom (also called a gender neutral or gender free bathroom) is accessible to people with any gender identity.

**Gender-nonconforming:** A term that often refers to youth who express gender in ways that differ from societal expectations of the sex and gender assigned to them at birth.

**Genderqueer:** A gender identity outside the gender binary.



**Heterosexism:** The belief that heterosexuality is the only natural sexuality and is superior to other sexualities (from a religious, moral, social, emotional, behavioural or any other perspective). Also the assumption that all people are or should be heterosexual (this may be conscious or unconscious belief). Heterosexism is much more pervasive and subtle than homophobia and can be seen daily in media, advertising, etc.

**Homophobia:** The fear, ignorance and mistreatment of people who are, or are perceived to be, lesbian, gay or bisexual. This often leads to bias, discrimination, hatred, harassment and marginalization of lesbian, gay or bisexual people. Homophobic violence can also be targeted towards any individual, regardless of perceived sexual orientation.

**Intersex:** Refers to people whose reproductive or sexual anatomy is not easily defined as male or female. There are a variety of ways someone can be intersex, ranging from having ambiguous genitalia to having mixture of XX and XY chromosomes. Intersex individuals have historically been mistreated in North American society (i.e. being forced to have “corrective” genital surgeries as infants.) The word hermaphrodite was historically used to describe intersex individuals, however, this term is considered highly offensive.

**Lesbian:** A woman who is attracted to other women.

**LGBT2Q+:** An acronym that stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, two-spirit and queer/questioning. There are a wide range of other terms often included in this acronym such as asexual, intersex, etc., and this acronym tends to vary depending on the source. The plus sign (+) indicates the inclusion of all sexual and gender identities within the queer community.

**Marginalized:** People who are from a marginalized group face both individual prejudice (some people don't see them as valuable members of society) and societal discrimination (difficulty in finding work or housing, barriers to accessing proper health care, events don't take their needs into consideration, etc.).

**Oppression:** People or groups experience oppression when their mistreatment and marginalization is socially supported – they are discriminated against as a whole in our society. Heterosexism, racism, and ableism are all forms of oppression.

**Pansexual:** Refers to someone who is attracted to people of all genders or sexes (such as men, women, and people who identify outside the gender binary).

**Pangender:** gender identity that includes all genders; multi-gender; omni-gender.

**Polyamorous:** Someone who maintains romantic relationships with more than one partner (non-monogamous). There are many ways to be polyamorous, but a consistent theme amongst polyamorous relationships is communication and consent of all involved. Polyamorous relationships, like monogamous relationships, can be short term or long term and are romantically committed relationships.

**Privilege:** Refers to the social, economic and political advantages and power held by people from dominant groups on the basis of attributes such as gender, race, sexual orientation, and social class.

**Pronouns:** The words one uses to refer to themselves (e.g. he, she, his, hers, they, etc.) Please use the pronouns preferred by each individual.

**Queer:** An umbrella term (often used in place of the LGBT2Q+ acronym) used to describe individuals who identify as being part of sexual and gender diverse communities (i.e. lesbian, gay, transgender). Historically the term queer was considered offensive by LGBT2Q+ communities, however, it has been reclaimed in recent decades as a way to take the power back and away from homophobic and transphobic insults. Because of its history the movement to reclaim this word, the term Queer is often thought of as being a highly politicized term.

**QTIPOC:** Acronym for Queer, Trans, and Indigenous People of Colour.

**Racism:** The prejudice, discrimination and marginalization experienced by people as a result of the (often unconscious or unstated) belief that one “race” is better or more capable than others. In North America, society has historically been organized in ways that privilege white people over people of colour and indigenous people.

**Sexism:** The belief that men and characteristics seen as masculine are superior to women and characteristics seen as feminine. Homophobia can be based in sexist beliefs (men who engage in behaviours or activities considered more feminine are thought to be weak).

**Sexual Identity:** Refers to a person's attraction towards a particular gender or sex. Someone may identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, pansexual, etc. It is important to remember that sexual identity and gender identity are separate.







**Sizeism:** Prejudice and discrimination against people based on their size or weight. Sizeism especially affects people who are seen as fat, often falsely assuming they are unhealthy and don't take care of themselves.

**Trans:** (also Trans\*, Transgender, Transsexual) An umbrella term that can be used to describe people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from what they were assigned at birth. Some trans people may choose to medically transition by taking hormones, having surgery. Some trans people may choose to socially transition by changing their name, clothing, hair, etc.

**Transfeminine:** This umbrella term may describe people who were assigned male at birth, who identify as trans, and whose gender expression leans towards the feminine.

**Transmasculine:** This umbrella term may describe people who were assigned female at birth, who identify as trans, and whose gender expression leans towards the masculine.

**Transphobia:** Fear, ignorance and mistreatment of people who are, or are perceived to be, trans. This often leads to bias, discrimination, hatred, harassment and marginalization of transgender or gender-nonconforming people. Transphobic

violence can also be targeted towards any individual, regardless of perceived gender expression.

**Transition:** A term most commonly used to refer to someone transitioning from one gender to another. Transition often consists of a change in style of dress, selection of a new name, and a request that people use the correct pronoun when describing them. Transition may, but does not always, include medical care like hormone therapy, counselling, and/or surgery.

**Two Spirit:** An Indigenous term describing the embodiment of both masculine and feminine spirits. This identity is not limited to gender expression or sexuality, but encompasses them both while incorporating a spiritual element. It is a standalone identity, not an Indigenous term for gay or lesbian. Historically, Two Spirit people were highly revered in many Indigenous cultures, occupying important roles such as healers and matchmakers. The influence of western religion on Indigenous cultures during colonization had a negative impact on the ways Two Spirit people were regarded in their communities; it is only in recent decades that this identity is being reclaimed.





Nicolette & Laura, Whatever Group, West Vancouver, BC

## Appendix B: Thinking About Allyship

Not everyone comes to the GSA with the same experiences. Some people face oppression in more than one way in their lives, and it's important that they too feel included and welcome in GSA meetings and activities. That's where allyship comes in! Allies care deeply about other people and want to make sure that everyone has access to spaces and activities that are welcoming of all of their identities.

Allyship is about working in solidarity with people who have experienced marginalization in ways that we have not: it means listening to people's experiences and needs, and making sure that you are doing your best to create a space where these experiences are acknowledged and these needs are met. It is about showing care and compassion, and reflecting on the privilege you carry in this world.

Remember that being an ally is more than calling yourself one. You show allyship through your actions as well as your words; when people see you do the work of being an ally, they will recognize you as one. Here are some of the things you can do to practice allyship:

- Read, watch documentaries, and attend events so you can better understand the privilege(s) that you carry in the world due to your dominant identity(ies) (that could be in terms of gender identity, gender expression, sexuality, class, race, ability, etc.).
- When you are organizing an event or facilitating a discussion, make sure that people who experience various forms of marginalization are not forgotten.
- Think about the way you might joke or make fun of people based on their race, gender, class, ability level, etc. Encourage your friends to reflect on this as well, and together, come up with jokes that don't perpetuate negative stereotypes!
- Model inclusive leadership by recognizing that barriers exist for people who have been marginalized and by doing your best to eliminate those barriers.

- Try to interrupt discussions or behaviours that contribute to marginalization, for example if you hear people use stereotypes or make negative assumptions about someone simply because they have a certain identity.
- Pay attention to the amount of space that you take up in public discussions (in meetings, at work or in class): how often and how long do you speak? Make sure other people have room to share their own experiences too.
- Being an ally is not always easy. Sometimes, even though we see ourselves as allies, someone from a marginalized community might challenge something that we said or did. Everyone gets it wrong sometimes. It's often tempting to get defensive, but instead it's best to try to listen to the other person, and learn from that experience. No single workshop or discussion is enough to learn how to change our language and behaviour. Demonstrating allyship is a life-long process!

If you are supporting someone who is trying to become a better ally, remember to show patience and compassion as you communicate with them about what they did or said that was hurtful. Remember to address the idea and not the person! And don't hesitate to share resources with them so you don't have to answer all of their questions yourself.

When two or more people come together ready to show care, understanding, and compassion for each other, they can create a space that is conducive to having difficult conversations about issues of oppression, marginalization, and privilege. These discussions can be emotionally draining for everyone, so it's a good idea to go do something fun and relaxing afterwards. At the end of the day, it's all about creating positive and stronger relationships, and having fun with each other!



## Appendix C: Sample inclusion policy: Vancouver School Board

### POLICY STATEMENT

The Board of Education (the “Board”) is committed to establishing and maintaining a safe, inclusive, equitable, and welcoming learning and working environment for all members of the school community, perceived as) lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, Two Spirit, and those who are questioning their sexual orientation and/or gender identity (LGBTQQ+). regardless of real or perceived sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions, which includes lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans\*, Two-Spirit, queer, and those who are questioning(LGBTQQ+) .

The Board believes that all LGBTQQ+ students, staff and families have the right to have:

- their confidentiality protected and respected;
- self-identification and determination; and
- their unique identities, families, cultures, and communities included, represented, valued, and respected within all aspects of the school environment.

The Board will promote pro-active strategies and guidelines so that all members of this diverse community are welcomed, respected, accepted and supported in every school and worksite.

The Board is committed to implementing measures that will:

- define appropriate expectations, language, behaviours and actions in order to prevent discrimination and harassment;
- ensure that complaints of discrimination or harassment based on sexual orientation, gender identity and/or gender expression are taken seriously and dealt with expeditiously and effectively through consistently applied policy and procedures;
- raise awareness and improve understanding of the lives of people who identify as LGBTQQ+; and
- strive to eliminate the systemic inequities and barriers for members of the school community whose real or perceived identity is LGBTQQ+ (or are perceived as such) and demonstrate accountability in leadership so that everyone is treated with fairness and respect.

### REGULATIONS

#### A. Anti-Harassment

The Board will strive to prevent and to provide effective procedures to respond to any language or behaviour that degrades, denigrates, labels, or stereotypes students on the basis of their real or perceived sexual and/or gender identities and/or gender expression, or that incites hatred, prejudice, discrimination or harassment on such bases.

#### B. Leadership

The Board will consult with the Pride Advisory Committee to ensure that policy directions, priorities and implementation of programs and services are consistent with this Sexual Orientation and Gender Identities policy.

There will be ongoing, constructive and open dialogue with LGBTQQ+ communities to increase co-operation and collaboration among home, school and the community. Administrators, teachers, counsellors, and other staff and student leaders should consult with LGBTQQ+ students and their designated support groups and take concrete actions to make schools more welcoming, inclusive and safer places. Staff will not refer students to programs or services that attempt to change a student’s sexual orientation or gender identity.

#### C. Professional Development and Training

The Board will strive to ensure that professional development and training is provided for staff to develop the awareness, knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to:

- deliver an LGBTQQ+ inclusive curriculum (including anti-homophobia and anti-transphobia education);
- identify and address homophobic and transphobic discriminatory attitudes and behaviours; and
- support and advocate for the needs of students whose real or perceived identity is LGBTQQ+

#### D. Counselling and Student Support

The Board will ensure that:

- counsellors are trained to respond competently to the needs of LGBTQQ+ students as well as to the needs of students with LGBTQQ+ family members;
- counsellors and staff are provided with information, from the district, on support programs or services for students and families;
- elementary and secondary schools appoint at least one staff person to be a Safe Contact who is able to act as a resource person for LGBTQQ+ students, staff and families. (Note: School administrators will act as the Safe Contact if no one voluntarily steps forward.) School administrators will inform students and other staff about





- the location and availability of this contact person; and
- all secondary schools are supported in establishing and maintaining Gay or Queer/Straight Alliance clubs.

### E. Curriculum Learning Resources

The Board is committed to:

- ensuring that staff utilizes language and educational resources and approaches that are inclusive, developmentally appropriate, and respectful of diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions;
- enabling all LGBTTTQ+ students and families to see themselves and their lives positively reflected in the curriculum, through the provision of library and other curricular resources;
- creating or acquiring developmentally appropriate, current and relevant learning resources for sexual health education that are LGBTTTQ+ inclusive; and
- providing learning resources in languages and in formats easily accessible to ELL students and their families, where possible.

### F. Communications

The Board will:

- acknowledge through its communication to students, staff, and the community that some students live in LGBTTTQ+ families and need to be positively recognized and included as such; and
- ensure that school forms and communications reflect the diversity of sexual orientations and gender identities of students, staff and parents/guardians.

### G. Gender Identity and Gender Expression

To support the safety, health, and educational needs of students whose real or perceived identity is trans\*, staff shall adhere to the following practices:

#### 1. Consultation

School staff are encouraged to consult with district staff, to review best practices for supporting trans\* students.

#### 2. Confidentiality and Privacy

a) A student's trans\* status, legal name, or gender assigned at birth may constitute confidential personal information that will be kept confidential unless its disclosure is legally required or unless the independent student or the student's parent(s)/guardian have given authorization.

- b) In situations where school staff or administrators are required by law to use or to report a trans\* student's legal name or sex, such as for purposes of data collection, school staff and administrators will adopt practices to avoid the inadvertent disclosure of such information.
- c) Students' rights to discuss and express their gender identity and/or gender expression openly and to decide when, with whom, and how much private information to share will be recognized and protected will be respected.

#### 3. Names and Pronouns

Trans\* students will be addressed by the names and pronouns that corresponds to their gender identity they prefer to use.

#### 4. Official Records and Student Information

- a) Whenever possible and permitted by law, requests made by an in a student, or the parent/guardian, to change the student's official record to reflect their preferred name and/or gender identity will be accommodated.
- b) Whenever possible, at the request of a student or of a students' parent(s)/guardian, the student's preferred name and/or gender identity will be included on class lists, timetables, student files, identification cards, etc.
- c) Unless the student or the student's parent/guardian has specified otherwise, communications between school and home shall use a student's legal name and the pronoun corresponding to the student's gender assigned at birth.

#### 5. Dress

Students have the right to dress in a manner consistent with their gender identity or gender expression. This includes students who may dress in a manner that is not consistent with societal expectations of masculinity/femininity.

#### 6. Sex-segregated Activities

Schools will reduce or eliminate the practice of segregating students by sex. In situations where students are segregated by sex, trans\* students will have the option to be included in the group that corresponds to their gender identity.





## 7. Access to Physical Education and Sports

- a) Where possible, students will be permitted to participate in any sex-segregated recreational and competitive athletic activities, in accordance with their gender identity. Due to issues of disclosure and safety, some students may wish to participate in a sex-segregated activity that is not aligned with their gender identity.
- b) Trans\* students shall be provided the same opportunities to participate in physical education as all other students, shall not be asked or required to have physical education outside of the assigned class time, and shall be permitted to participate in any sex-segregated activities in accordance with their gender identity if they so choose.

## 8. Washroom and Change Room Accessibility

- a) The use of washrooms and change rooms by trans\* students shall be assessed on a case-by-case basis with the goals of maximizing the student's social integration, ensuring the student's safety and comfort, minimizing stigmatization and providing equal opportunity to participate in physical education classes and sports.
- b) Trans\* students shall have access to the washroom and change room that corresponds to their gender identity. Students who desire increased privacy will be provided with a reasonable alternative washroom and/

or changing area. Any alternative arrangement will be provided in a way that protects the student's ability to keep their trans\* status confidential.

- c) The decision with regard to washroom and change room use shall be made in consultation with the trans\* student.
- d) The Board will strive to make available single stall gender neutral washrooms at all school locations and worksites

## 9. Student Transfers

Schools will aim to keep trans\* students at their original school site, unless it is a student's wish to transfer. Should the student wish to transfer, it is not necessary to disclose the student's gender identity and/or gender expression as the reason for transfer.

## 10. Resolving Conflict

Disputes will be resolved in a manner that involves the trans\* student and an adult ally (teacher, service provider, parent/guardian) in the decision-making process to maximize inclusiveness.

**For a list of policies from around the country, see <http://www.myGSA.ca>**



## Appendix D: BC Teachers' Federation Statement of Support for LGBTQ Students and Staff

(All of these appear on pages 84, 145 and 152 in the 2010/11 BCTF Member's Guide)

### C. Social Justice POLICIES

12.25—That the BCTF is opposed to:

- (a) using and/or promoting reparative therapies aimed at changing lesbian, gay or bisexual students' sexual orientation; and
- (b) referring students to therapists who promote and practice reparative therapies.

(Nov. 00 RA, p. 5)

34.157—That the BCTF support Bill C-389 and urge the Federal Government to amend the Canadian Human Rights Act and the Criminal Code to protect trans-identified people by explicitly adding gender identity and gender expression to the prohibited grounds for discrimination within the act. (June 10 RA, p. 17)

41.C.03—(a) That the BCTF actively support the establishment of Gay/Straight Alliance (GSA) support groups in middle and high schools throughout BC;

(b) That the BCTF actively encourage local leaders to facilitate the establishment of Gay/Straight Alliance (GSA) student support groups in middle and high schools in their locals.

(00 AGM, p. 18)

41.C.05—That locals of the BCTF be encouraged to work with school boards to develop and implement policies that will facilitate the use of learning materials that convey inclusive and positive portrayals of same-sex families. (Jan./Feb. RA 03 p. 19)

41.C.07—That members of the BCTF be encouraged to address same-sex family issues in their classrooms in the context of relevant curriculum.

(Jan./Feb. RA 03 p. 19)

41.C.09—That in consideration of the implications of the Supreme Court decision, the Ministry of Education undertake a progressive leadership role in addressing the issues of same-sex families and sexual minority students.

(Jan./Feb. RA 03 p. 19)

41.C.11—That the local social justice contacts and committees are the driving force in developing the Federation's

priorities and actions in social justice, and that the social justice work of the Federation be premised on this tenet. (Feb. 04 Ex, p. 8)

41.C.15—That the BCTF encourage locals to include a social justice budget line when building their annual budgets. (June 05 Ex, p. 20)

41.D.10—That the BCTF encourage sponsor teachers to support pre-service teachers to integrate social justice issues into their practicum teaching. (08 AGM, p. 25)

41.D.12—That the BCTF encourage locals to work with school districts to develop and implement discrete policies on LGBTQ harassment and discrimination. (08 AGM, p. 25)

### Social Justice PROCEDURES

34.20—That the BCTF condemn homophobic acts. (93 AGM, p. 13)

41.C.02—That locals have autonomy to create a local social justice structure that meets the needs of the local. (Feb. 04 Ex., p. 8)

41.C.06—That the BCTF and its locals actively lobby school boards to develop and implement policies designed to protect teachers from harassment based upon their real or perceived sexual orientation and/or gender identity. (Jan. 07 Ex., p. 2)

41.C.08—That the BCTF publicize with the membership that antigay slurs and homophobic incidents directed towards teachers by their colleagues are a form of harassment. (07 AGM, p. 22)

41.C.17—That local unions work with school districts to develop or review anti-homophobia policy to ensure that these policies include a requirement that all homophobic incidents at schools and other worksites be reported to the district and that action be taken on these incidents. (June 06 RA, p. 14)

41.C.19—That locals work with school districts to develop or revise anti-discrimination and equity policies and education practices to ensure they are consistent with the BC Human Rights Act and School Act. (June 06 RA, p. 15)





## Appendix E:

### GSA Feedback

Has the GSA made a positive difference in your school?  
Please give us some details about your answer :

YES

NO

What have you liked the most about the GSA?

What would make the GSA better?

Are there any projects that you think would be good for your GSA to do in the school?  
Please give us some details:

Any other comments?



## APPENDIX F

### Sample agenda

You can use the sample agenda below to help you draft up an agenda for your first GSA meeting. Remember that there's no one way to do this, so don't feel like you have to come up with an agenda that's as detailed as this one. And keep in mind that everything is likely to take a little longer than you anticipated, especially at the beginning when everyone might still be getting to know each other!

#### GSA meeting at Salish Sea Secondary School

Date: October 11

Location: Soaring Eagle Room 222

Time: 12-1:30pm

#### Agenda

- **5min 12-12:05**  
Stand at by entrance to welcome participants as they enter. If people sit by themselves, pull up a chair and chat with them.
- **5min 12:05-12:10**  
Introduce the GSA then go around so people can share their name and pronouns. Members of the planning committee and the teacher sponsor should identify themselves. Recognize the territory: "Before going further, I wish to acknowledge that this GSA meeting is taking place on the ancestral, traditional and unceded Indigenous territories of the \_\_\_\_\_ (ie. Coast Salish) Peoples, and in particular, the \_\_\_\_\_ (name of First Nations, ex. the Squamish, Musqueam, and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations in Metro Vancouver) on whose territory we stand." (Faiza to lead) Be welcoming to late arrivals, but don't shine too much of spotlight on them. Maybe they were mustering the courage to come.
- **10min 12:10-12:20**  
Ice Breaker (Phuong to lead)
- **10min 12:20-12:30**  
Why have you decided to attend? (Kai to lead)
- **15min 12:30-12:45**  
Create guidelines (Jia to lead)
- **8min 12:45-12:53**  
Brainstorm future GSA activities with participants (Sasha to lead)
- **5min 12:53-12:58**  
Closing Activity (Faiza to lead)
- **2min 12:58-1**  
Reminder of next meeting (Sasha to lead)



## Appendix G: Ice breakers and other games to get to know each other

### Name whip

Go around in a circle. The first person says their name; the second person says their name and also says the first person's name over again, and so on all the way around the circle. The last person has to repeat everyone's name. As a variation, have each person say their name AND what plant they would be, if they could be a plant. This way there is more to remember than simply people's names, which makes it more interesting. Another variation is to have everyone say an adjective plus their name, but the adjective must begin with the same letter... for example, Daring Devyani, Raucous Rain, Fantastic Finn, etc.

### Picture-guessing game

Everybody draws a picture that expresses something about themselves. The drawings are collected. One by one, the drawings are pulled out of a box and held up, and the group tries to guess who drew it. Whoever guesses correctly is the next one to choose a drawing out of the box to hold up for the group to guess. When someone guesses correctly, the person who drew the picture is given a chance to explain its meaning to the group.

### Three things in common

Each student pairs up with another student they don't know. They have to find three things that they have in common. Then each pair of students tells the rest of the group what they found out.

### The north wind blows

Organize chairs into a tight circle, and have everyone sit down except the group leader. Make sure there are no extra chairs. The leader starts the game by standing inside the circle and saying, "The north wind blows for everyone who \_\_\_\_\_" (fill in the blank with something that is true for them). Whoever fits the criteria (including the group leader) must get up and move to another vacated seat within the circle. One person will end up without a seat. This person continues the game by saying "The north wind blows for anyone who \_\_\_\_\_." The north wind could blow for anyone wearing jeans, people who have older siblings, people who ate breakfast, people who listen to Lady Gaga, etc. Make this game silly by asking everyone to move in the same way, for example by hopping on one foot, or walking on all fours, etc.

### Toss the ball

(requires a soft ball)

Get in a circle. Toss the ball around and say the name of the

person you toss it to. To make things even more challenging, introduce 2 or 3 balls into the game.

### Animal charades

Get in groups of three. Each group is given the name of an animal. They must come up with a way to demonstrate that animal, or act it out as a team. Then each group presents their demonstration to the group, who has to guess what animal it is.

### People bingo

People bingo is a good way to get to know others. It works the same as regular bingo—create a game sheet with different things on it like "has broken a bone" or "has lived in more than 5 places", etc. Group members have to go around and find people who fit in each category and write their names on the piece of paper. Be creative in your game sheet!

PEOPLE BINGO			
Can speak more than 1 language	Born outside of BC	Can read music	Visited another country
Knows the year	Can sing	Can spell their name in sign language	Has a pet
Knows history of Stonewall	Knows how to turn a condom into a dental dam	Knows a safe space for queer/trans people in the community	Knows what two-spirit means
Can name 3 queer icons	Has been to a pride parade	Knows what the upside down pink triangle — represents	Can touch their nose with their tongue





### Zip/Zap/Zop

Get in a circle. Someone begins by pointing to another person in the circle and saying “ZIP!” That person then points to yet another person and says “ZAP!” That person points to another person and says “ZOP!” This continues, but the words must be said in order: ZIP, ZAP, ZOP. If someone makes a mistake and says a word out of order, that person is out of the game. Eventually, the circle dwindles to just a few people, then to only two people, who are staring at each other, yelling ZIP!, ZAP!, ZOP! until one of them makes a mistake.

### Two truths and a lie

This is a good game for a group where no one knows each other well. Each person has to tell two truths and one lie about themselves, and the others have to guess which one is the lie. The key is to make the truths as unusual and as interesting as the lie!

### Orb

Get in a circle. Toss an imaginary orb around the circle. It changes shape, size, and noise when it transfers hands. Whoever catches the orb demonstrates how heavy it is and what shape it takes by the way they catch it. The person who catches it also has to make the noise of the orb, which also changes from person to person.

### Island

Find a big stump or rock, or make a circle on the ground about two feet in diameter, and dub this the ‘island.’ The entire group must figure out a way to stand all together on the island for two minutes.

### Order out of chaos

The group has to line up according to eye color... darkest to lightest... without saying a word. Another option is to have the group line up according to height...shortest to tallest...or age... youngest to oldest for an extra challenge!

### Mass stand up

Have the group sit in a circle, backs to the middle. Now, have everyone link elbows with the person sitting next to them. Then, try to stand up as a group. It’s a lot tougher than it sounds!

### Human knot

Have the group stand in a tight circle, shoulder-to-shoulder, and place their hands in the center. Now, have them grab a couple of hands, but make sure no one grabs two hands belonging to the same person, or grabs either of the hands of the person standing directly next to them.

Then, unravel the knot you’ve just created without anyone letting go of another person’s hand.

### Intro to the left

The group sits in a circle. Each person has to introduce the person on the left. Take five minutes (total) to talk to both the person on your left and the person on your right. One by one, each person introduces the person on their left.

### Scattergories

Identify a category and 4 choices within the category. Each choice corresponds to one corner of the room. People are to stand in a corner that they most identify with. For example: “Music is the category. If you like ‘pop music’ stand in this corner, if you like ‘country/folk’ music, stand in the other corner, if you like ‘hip hop’, stand in this corner and if you are into ‘other types of music’ stand in the last corner. When groups have made their decision, you can ask each group to come up with 5 things they have in common with each other. Share in large group. You can choose other categories as well (example, favourite seasons; favourite ice-cream flavours; favourite foods, etc.).

### What you don’t know

Hand out slips of paper and ask people to write down something about themselves that they think nobody else in the room knows. Then collect the sheets, shuffle them, hand them out again (make sure nobody gets their own). Each person reads out what is on their slip, one by one, and the group tries to guess who wrote it. This really gets people laughing! Unless you have a lot of time, this game isn’t recommended for groups larger than 15 or so, because these tidbits about people tend to be surprising and prompt curiosity and discussion.

### Birthday line

Take some tape and draw two parallel lines on the floor about a foot and a half wide. Everyone has to stand in a row inside the lines and make sure their feet aren’t touching the tape lines. They can stand side by side in the line so that the task is not impossible. Once everyone’s gathered, tell them that they now have to arrange each other in birthday order without stepping out of or on the lines and without talking. As people step out of the line they have to go to the beginning and start from there.



## Appendix H: Workshop outlines

### INCLUSIVE EVENT PLANNING WORKSHOP (6+ PARTICIPANTS)

#### Objective:

To practice our event planning and inclusive leadership skills by having participants design a safe, substance-free mock event.

#### Check-in (10min):

How you are doing? Name an event you attended or helped to put on that was well organized and say why.

#### Sam's Game (30-60minutes):

##### Materials:

Flip chart, poster board & markers for each group.

##### Instructions:

- Divide the group into two teams. Take one participant from each team. These two people will now collectively be known as "Sam."
- The remaining members of the two groups must now design a drug & alcohol free event for Sam to attend. Although more details will be revealed about Sam later, no one knows much about Sam other than:

#### "Sam is a young queer person who is looking to do something for their prom."

- The task for the two groups is to create a drug and alcohol free space for Sam to celebrate their prom. The budget is \$700. The two groups have 45 minutes to plan Sam's best-est event yet! At the end of the 45 minutes, each group will then be given 5 minutes to present their pitch to "Sam." Groups must use the posterboard and markers to create an advertisement for their event. After both groups have presented, "Sam" will reveal their decision. Hint: you must create the most inclusive event ever!
- While the groups are working on their events, the two participants known as "Sam" will be in another room where they will also be brainstorming what could make the event the most accessible and fun for them. More will be revealed about "Sam," but only to these two participants:

**"Sam is a shy 16 year old single parent of immigrant background who is in recovery. Sam lives with their single parent who doesn't know Sam is queer. Sam has been to a local queer youth group before and has felt excluded. Sam**

**has very limited income and any extra income is spent on their child. At this event, Sam is expecting at least 100 people and hoping to meet new people who aren't using drugs or alcohol."**

- "Sam" will list some of the things they might need from the event organizers that would make it more accessible for them to attend. This will make it easier to evaluate whether the events being designed by the two groups will meet Sam's needs. Let "Sam" know that while they will be listening to each group's presentation- they will not actually need to make a choice. The facilitator will reveal this to the two groups once they've presented.
- Invite Sam back into the room and have each group present their work. "Sam" then reveals more information about their identity and the things they were looking for in an ideal event.
- The facilitator can wrap up the presentations by humorously saying something like "guess what- it looks like Sam might have time to attend both after all!" and letting groups know that there really is no competition- we simply wanted to get those fiery creative energies flowing.

#### Debrief (10 min):

- Knowing what we know now about Sam, what concrete things would have made the event more accessible to Sam?
- What support would get Sam more engaged in their community?
- What local organizations could Sam get involved in to feel more engaged in their community?
- How did groups make the event inclusive to:
  - people of colour?
  - people with disabilities?
  - people of various ages?
  - young people who are parents?
  - people from limited income?
  - people with non-binary genders?
  - people with diverse sexual identities?

When organizing events, it becomes important that we aren't creating any barriers for participation of young people from marginalized communities. Marginalized folks are often excluded from leadership opportunities as well as being invited to be participants in events. It becomes important for us to raise our consciousness to be inclusive of those who have traditionally been left out.

#### Closing round: (10min)

What insight did you gain or are more aware of when it comes to organizing inclusive events?



## POSSIBILITY MODELS

### DISCUSSION (4+ PARTICIPANTS)

**\*Note:** This discussion will take place over two sessions or meetings.

#### Objective:

To learn more about LGBT2Q+ folks in our community so we can be inspired by their lives, actions, and experiences.

#### Session 1:

##### Check in (10 min):

Sit in a circle. Have one person in the circle start the check in by stating their name, the pronouns they use (she, he, they, zie, xee, etc.), and their favourite thing about themselves.

### Discovering Possibility Models (20 minutes):

**Objective:** To explore what it means to have a role model or possibility model.

**Materials:** Flip chart, markers.

**Instructions:** Write “role model” on the flipchart, then ask participants to brainstorm around the following question:

### What is a role model?

After participants have discussed this for a few minutes, ask them if they have ever heard of the term “possibility model.” If yes, ask a participant to explain the meaning of the term. If not, say that the term was made popular by Laverne Cox, an actor, artist, activist and trans woman of colour. Read the following quote by Laverne Cox:

*“I would never be so arrogant to think that someone should model their lives after me. But the idea of possibility, the idea that I get to live my dreams out in public, hopefully will show other folks that that is possible, so I prefer the term possibility model to role model.”*

Then, write “possibility” under the word “role” on the flipchart, and ask the participants the following questions. Remember to remind them that there are no right or wrong answers. These questions are just to get conversation going.

- What is the difference between a role model and a possibility model?
- Which term do you prefer? Why?
- What are some traits of someone you would consider a role or possibility model?

Why are role/possibility models important, especially for LGBT2Q+ people?

Remember to remind participants that role/possibility models are there to inspire, not to feel pressure to replicate exactly, or to live up to! Each person is their own fabulous, amazing inspiring person already!

### Finding Possibilities (10 minutes)

**Objective:** To encourage youth to explore and find inspiring possibility models.

**Instructions:** Going around in a circle, ask participants to name someone who they currently consider a role/possibility model. What do they find inspiring about this person? (Remind participants that GSA is a non-judgmental space, and it's important we don't judge each other's role models).

Once everyone has shared, remind participants that there is always room for possibilities in our lives. The task for next session will be to go away and research some possibility models, specifically around LGBT2Q+ identities. They could be either historical or current people, famous or only known to a few people! It doesn't matter! They are just looking for anyone who they find personally inspiring around LGBT2Q+ identities. Maybe this is because of how they identify, or maybe it's because of the things they've done in their life, or their amazing sense of style! Maybe they are artists, or musicians, or activists, or athletes, or scientists, or gamers, or teachers! There are so many reasons that someone could be a possibility model! Encourage participants to look into queer and trans histories, and to not be afraid to dig deeper!

Here are some great websites to get people started:

- <http://mygsa.ca/meeting-event-ideas/meeting-topic-ideas/role-models>
- <http://wehappytrans.com/>
- <http://www.revelandriot.com/resources/role-models/>
- <http://elixher.com/category/inspired-by/>
- <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/jun/08/five-trans-role-models>

Wish everyone luck, and remind them that this isn't homework- it's something they're encouraged to do if it works for them. It can be really fun to spend some time learning about role models, and the possibilities they show for our lives!

#### Session 2:

**Check in (10 minutes):** Sit in a circle. Have one person in the circle start the check in by stating their name, the pronouns they use (she, he, they, zie, xee, etc.), and what superpower they would most like to have!







Aliza Bosa, Trans Youth Drop-In, Vancouver, BC

## Revisiting Possibilities (40-60 minutes)

**Objective:** To share participants' perspectives on possibility models and who inspires them.

**Instructions:** Go around in a circle and ask each participant to share one or two people that they found as new possibility models for themselves. Ask them to answer some of the following questions:

- Who is this person?
- Why did you pick them?
- What do you find most inspiring about them?
- What have you learned from their story or experience?

### \*Note:

As participants are talking, you may want to write on a flipchart/whiteboard the names of their possibility models, along with a few key words that each participant is using to

describe why they chose this person. This provides everyone with an awesome visual of their possibility models, and some of their overlapping and different qualities!

### \*Possible extension activity:

Participants can use art supplies and magazines to make collages themed around their possibility model(s) that can be displayed around their school or community centre.

### Check Out (10 mins):

Sit in a circle. Have one person in the circle start the check out by giving one word for how they are feeling and something that they learned from the discussion today.



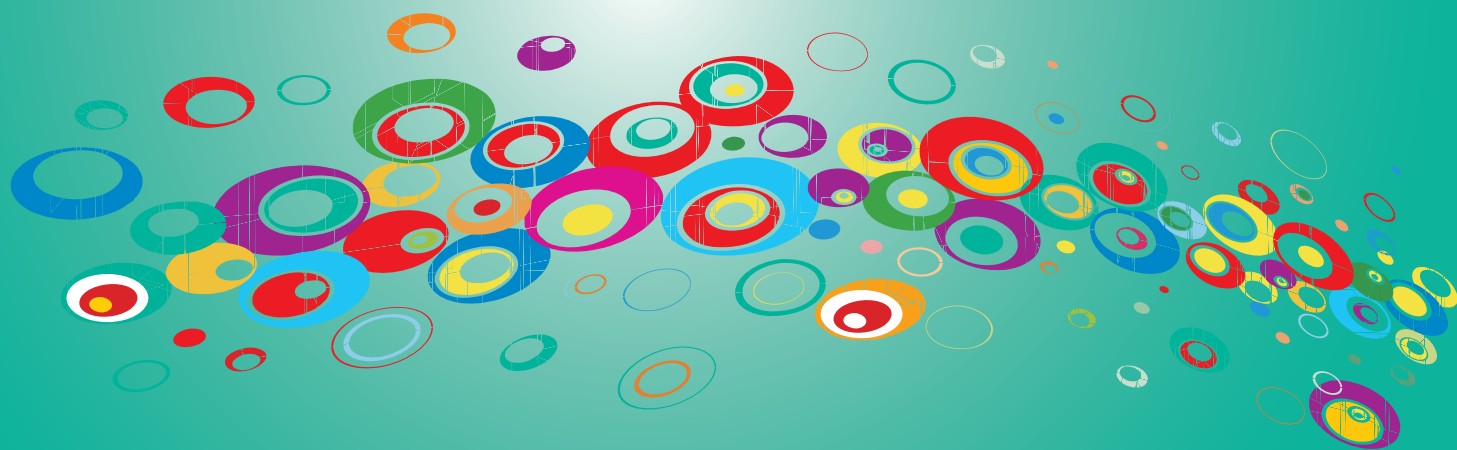
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- <sup>2</sup> Taylor, C. & Peter, T., with McMinn, T.L., Elliott, T., Beldom, S., Ferry, A., Gross, Z., Paquin, S., & Schachter, K. (2011). Every class in every school: The first national climate survey on homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia in Canadian schools. Final report. Toronto, ON: Egale Canada Human Rights Trust.
- <sup>3</sup> Konishi, C., Saewyc, E., Homma, Y., & Poon, C. (2013). Population-level evaluation of school-based interventions to prevent problem substance use among gay, lesbian and bisexual adolescents in Canada. *Preventive Medicine*, 57(6), 929–933.
- <sup>4</sup> See the full policy at the end of the manual (Appendix #3) or on the Vancouver School Board website: <http://www.vsb.bc.ca/district-policy/acb-r-1-sexual-orientation-and-gender-identities>
- <sup>5</sup> See the full article here: <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/british-columbia/vancouver-school-board-revises-gender-identities-policy/article19213966/>
- <sup>6</sup> Taylor, C. & Peter, T., with McMinn, T.L., Elliott, T., Beldom, S., Ferry, A., Gross, Z., Paquin, S., & Schachter, K. (2011). Every class in every school: The first national climate survey on homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia in Canadian schools. Final report. Toronto, ON: Egale Canada Human Rights Trust.
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- <sup>9</sup> Saewyc, E., Poon, C., Wang, N., Homma, Y., Smith, A. & the McCreary Centre Society. (2007). Not Yet Equal: The Health of Lesbian, Gay, & Bisexual Youth in BC. Vancouver, BC: McCreary Centre Society.
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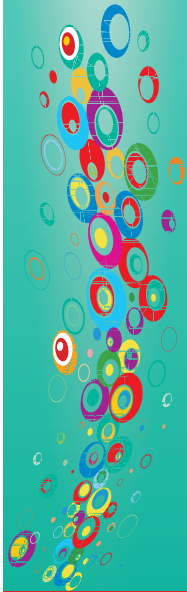
A GENDER AND SEXUALITY ALLIANCE MANUAL



Creating Supportive Communities For LGBTQ+ Youth







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