



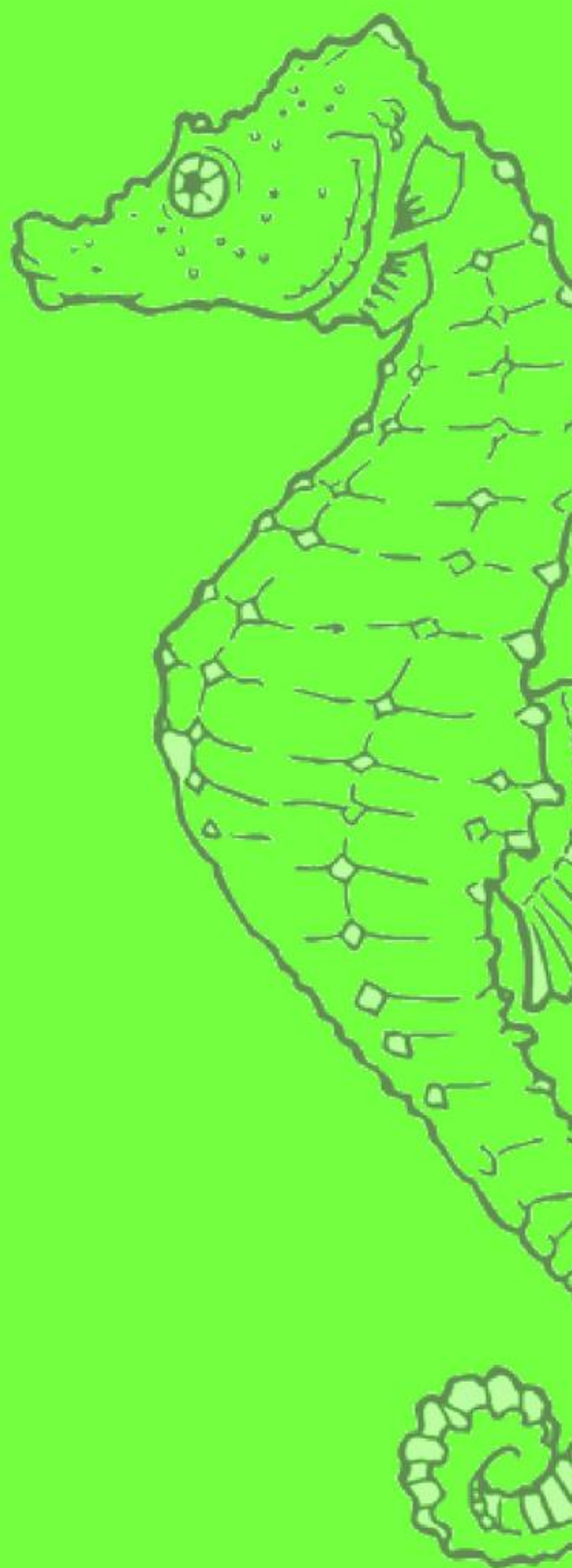
**NOVA
SCOTIA'S**

**GENDER/
SEXUALITY
ALLIANCE
(GSA)**

MANUAL

A Guide to creating
and sustaining your
school's GSA

 **youth
project**





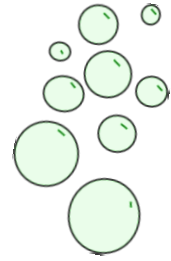
Nova Scotia's Gender and Sexuality Alliance Manual

A guide to creating and sustaining your school's GSA!

Bria MacKinnon
Community Engagement Coordinator
The Youth Project

2017

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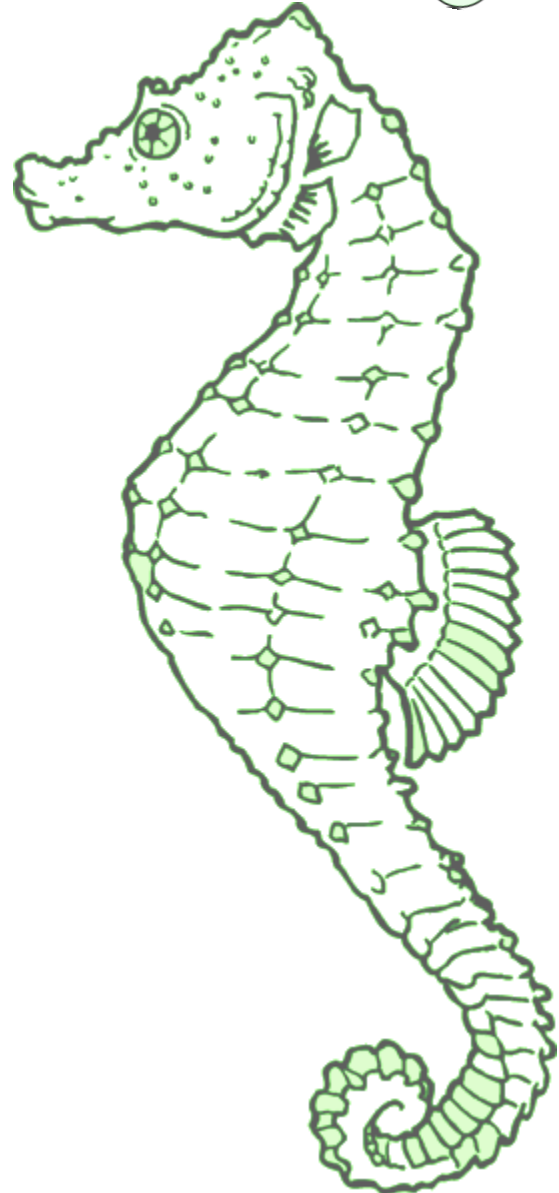
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Preface

As the Community Engagement Coordinator for The Youth Project, part of my job is traveling across Nova Scotia, meeting with GSAs who work hard to make this province a better place for LGBTQ+ people. I've had the opportunity to speak to hundreds of students, educators and supporters, each with their own unique experiences with sexual orientation and gender identity. It's the part of my job I most look forward to, learning from youth who want to create a better world.

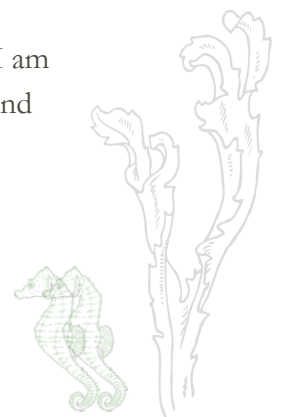
In 1998, The Youth Project held a conference for any students interested in starting a GSA. Two schools attended. Afterward, the first two GSAs formed at Horton and Millwood High Schools. This year we were thrilled to welcome over 40 schools from across Nova Scotia, and we support over 120 GSAs and our growing network of allies and supporters. This didn't happen by accident; this growth happened because more LGBTQ+ youth are speaking out.

Nova Scotia has seen the inclusion of sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression in our Human Rights Act, LGBT youth recognized with Human Rights awards, improved access to legal transition and transgender health, and creation of the Guidelines for Inclusion for Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming youth. I can confidently say these advances would not have happened without the strong voice of LGBTQ+ youth. If this is what we have done together so far, I can't wait to see what we do next.

Whether your group is large and takes charge, or a smaller group that's just beginning, you will hopefully find something in this manual to help you in your journey. If you need more skills to keep running or ideas to keep you going, we got you covered. If you are wondering where to begin, we got that too. Do not be discouraged if you are starting small: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has" (Margaret Mead).

Thank you to every educator who believes in creating safer spaces, and makes it a priority. Thank you to LGBTQ+ youth, who despite the presence of homophobia, biphobia and transphobia in their lives, continue to be resilient and amazing people. I am excited to see what happens now, and remember you not only change the world around you, but you forge an easier path for the LGBTQ+ youth who follow.

Bria MacKinnon, Community Engagement Coordinator
The Youth Project



Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge current and former staff members that have contributed to the Nova Scotia GSA Manuals and the continued success of GSAs in Nova Scotia:

Leighann Wichman, Kate Shewan, Aaron Stevens
Skye Cross, Adam Myatt, Julien Davis, Sandra Bornemann, Patrick Daigle
Nolan Pike, Justin Dubreuil, Shawn Wood, Maddox Greene,
Dori Palmiere, Gabriel Enxuga, Sheena Jamieson

Additionally, the Youth Board, both former and current members, have either been active in their GSAs or have helped to support GSAs in many capacities.

The Youth Project would not be able to support GSAs without the contributions and support of Nova Scotia's Department of Health and Wellness, The Canadian Women's Foundation, The Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, and the many community organizations that have provide support, resources, and wisdom along the way.

Thank you all for your role in making Nova Scotia a safer, happier and healthier place for LGBTQ* youth and their allies.





1. About the GSA Manual

This manual has been created to support Gender and Sexuality Alliances and the incredible work they do in Nova Scotia's schools and communities. This manual is intended for use by students, teachers, guidance counsellors, Youth Health Centre staff, other school staff, parents, Race Relations and Cross Cultural Understanding and Human Rights (RCH) Coordinators and anyone else who is interested in forming or maintaining a GSA in their school. Within this manual you will learn how to start and maintain a GSA in your school. Additionally, we will provide information on team work, communication, and leadership - the pillars of a successful GSA.

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



Photo Credit: Jody O'Brien,
4th Annual Nova Scotia GSA Conference: OUT LOUD!



2: The Youth Project



About Us

The Youth Project is a non-profit charity that provides support and services to youth, 25 and under, around the issues of sexual orientation and gender identity. Although we are based out of Halifax, we have a provincial mandate and will travel to youth, schools, and organizations around Nova Scotia to provide education, resources and support.

Mission Statement

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

Support Services

Supportive Counselling. The Youth Project provides supportive counselling for youth who want to talk to someone about sexual orientation or gender identity. Our support coordinator is available to listen, provide information and help youth get the support they need. We can provide support to families as well. If you want some questions answered, are experiencing harassment, are confused about who you are, are coming out, need help, or just want to talk, we are here.

Call and make an appointment to talk to someone. We can come to your school or community and meet with you there if you can't make it to us. We can also use Skype to chat for those of you who are far away. All you need to do is contact us by phone or email.

Our support worker can also help you get connected to other safe and supportive resources in your community.

Referrals. The Youth Project runs many programs and services but you may need something the Youth Project doesn't provide. We can help you get connected to the right resources, the right people, and the right programs for you. If you are looking for a professional, a program or an organization that is LGBTQ* positive, we can provide you with that information.

We can provide referrals to:

Doctors, Mental health programs, Therapists, Employment Programs, Education Programs

Police, Lawyers, Allies and programs for health issues such as eating disorders, addictions or anger management

If the referral you require is not listed please call and we will do our best to connect you with another organization that can provide assistance.

Education

In-class Workshops. We provide classroom education sessions on sexual orientation and gender identity for grades 1 through 12. Sessions examine terms and definitions around the issues of sexual orientation and gender identity, as well as provide an exploration of homophobia, transphobia, homophobic/transphobic language, and their effects on students. The interactive format allows students to participate in discussions and ask questions.

If you are a teacher and are interested in booking a workshop, please contact us at any time during the year to arrange a date and time for us to come in and do a session with your class. Please note that these workshops book up quickly, so contact us as early as possible to ensure availability.

Professional Development. The Youth Project is committed to providing professionals, university programs and organizations with sessions that cover issues of sexual orientation and gender identity as well as areas unique to each work environment. The length and audience of the session will determine the topics that will be covered. If your school or organization requires professional development around the issues of sexual orientation and gender identity, please contact us for a quote.

Youth Leadership

When the Youth Project became a non-profit, charitable, registered society, it officially became youth-directed with the creation of the Youth Board. The Youth Board is made up solely of youth, 25 and under, who are members of the Youth Project. The Youth Board is responsible for the programs and services we offer. The decisions around which programs and services to offer, how they are designed, and what changes need to be made are all controlled by the Youth Board. They are located on the same level as the Board of Directors and jointly make decisions on staffing, policy, and finances.

Social Opportunities

Monthly Programs. The Youth Project has a monthly schedule of regular programs. These programs happen once each month on a specific night. Check out our website for details.

Drop-In

Drop-In night is a chance to come down to the Youth Project and get support, hang out with friends, meet new people, join in an activity, check out the library, check out the food bank, or get some information. This event is open to all youth 25 and under. There are volunteers and staff present including our support worker.

Transformers

This is a support and discussion group for transgender and genderqueer youth, 25 and under. The purpose of this group is to bring together transgender and genderqueer youth to share experiences, talk about the issues around gender identity, and learn more about support options. The group decides on what topics and activities they would like to discuss or do. The group is facilitated by two knowledgeable volunteers from the community.

Movie Night

Come on out and see a movie with a LGBT theme or character. Fresh popcorn and snacks are available. Movies are viewed by LCD projector on a big screen with surround sound. Movie suggestions are always welcome.

Parents Night

This is a night for parents of LGBTQ* youth! Join other parents and discuss the challenges and triumphs of having an LGBTQ child.

Connect the Dots

The Youth Project is operating Connect the Dots with the support of the IWK and Halifax Public Libraries. Connect the Dots is a social support group for youth, ages 18 and under. It gives youth an opportunity to chat with their peers, make connections in a safe and supportive space, and take part in some fun activities! To check out the current library locations, please visit our website.

Events. Every year, The Youth Project hosts a variety of special events. Like our Facebook page www.facebook.com/nsyouthproject to stay updated!

Prom

The prom is a night for LGBTQ* youth and their friends to dance the night away in an environment that is free from harassment and judgment. It is usually held in a Halifax hotel ballroom. Each year the prom has a theme and the space is transformed to match the theme. Many choose to dress according to the theme, but everyone can dress however they feel comfortable. All those who attend will have the opportunity to have a prom photo taken and can leave with a lasting memory of the evening.

Summer Camps

Youth Project summer camps are a chance to get together with other youth from across Nova Scotia for a weekend of summer camp activities, LGBTQ+ information, and fun! Camps run on a refundable deposit of \$25.00, and include the age range of 20 and under. Activities include: writing, arts & crafts, scavenger hunts, support & discussion groups, resources, campfires, ghost stories, swimming, and much more!

Camp Coyote: A summer camp for non-binary or trans-identified youth

Camp Seahorse: A summer camp for LGBTQ+ youth.

Resources

Library. The Youth Project has an extensive library available to youth, their families and those who work with youth across Nova Scotia. While our library is located at our office, we are happy to mail books out to youth elsewhere in the province.

We have a very large selection of young adult fiction with LGBT themes, characters and authors. Our collection includes novels, graphic novels, poetry and comics. We have several books by Canadian authors. We also have several children's books. Our non-fiction section contains books on coming out, gender identity, parents of LGBT youth, homophobia, Gay Straight Alliances, healthy living and relationships, and many more topics.

Resources. On The Youth Project's website, you will find information on sexual orientation and gender identity for youth, parents, educators and supporters, including general support information, healthier relationships and sexual health information, English and non-English resources for parents, and links to posters and visual information. We also upload book lists and recommendations for youth, parents and more.

Gender and Sexuality Alliance (GSA) Support

The Youth Project has been working with GSAs since 1998, when we held a GSA leadership conference for those interested in starting GSAs in their schools. The Youth Project has been working alongside LGBTQ youth to support the continued success and expansion of GSAs throughout Nova Scotia's schools.

GSA Support. The Youth Project has a GSA Coordinator who provides support, education, and resources to GSA around the province!

GSA Conference. Every year we host the Nova Scotia Provincial GSA Conference! They get bigger and better every year with our biggest having over 250 GSA youth leaders and advisors in attendance. The GSA Conference is a day of skill-building workshops, creating connections and making friends. Make sure to join our mailing list to stay informed on all things GSA related and The Youth Project: www.youthproject.ns.ca/gsa.

GSA Network. Join our growing GSA Network! The GSA Network is a database of GSAs from all over Nova Scotia. Use the network to reach out and connect with GSAs in your area. If you join, we send you a FREE full size pride flag!



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

What is a GSA?



Gender and Sexuality Alliances or Gay Straight Alliances (GSAs) are student led groups that strive to make their schools safer for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Questioning (LGBTQ*) youth through advocacy, awareness, education, and support efforts. They provide a venue for students to make friends in a safe and accepting space, as well as providing opportunities for students to get involved in their schools and work for change. The function of GSAs vary from school to school. Some are sites for advocacy and awareness, while other are support groups for LGBTQ youth and their allies.

Recently the language has shifted from Gay Straight Alliance to Gender and Sexuality Alliance to better capture the diversity of sexual orientation and gender identity and to become a more inclusive space for transgender students.



Definitions: Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity. In this manual the acronym LGBTQ* will be used rather than LBGT*TIQQPA2A*. The shorter acronym is used as it is easier to read, but please keep in mind that sexual orientation and gender identity are incredibly complex issues and consist of many different identities and experiences. Sexual orientation and gender identity are often confused, but they are two separate things. Your sexual orientation describes who you are physically, emotionally, and romantically attracted to. Gender identity is your innate sense of being a man, woman, or somewhere in between. Check out the section on how to make your GSA trans-inclusive for a more in-depth look at gender identity.

Why is there a need for GSAs?

There has been significant progress towards combating homophobia and transphobia in Nova Scotia over the past few years, with the inclusion of Gender Identity and Gender Expression in the Nova Scotia Human Rights Act in 2012, implementation for funding for Gender Reassignment Surgeries through MSI, and the creation of the Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Guidelines through the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. While these

are historic steps towards equality, homophobia and transphobia are still prevalent in Nova Scotia schools and communities.

In Nova Scotia, it has been found that being a member, or being perceived to be a member, of the LGBTQ* communities was the most likely factor to attract bullying (MacKay, 2012). EGALE Canada's 2011 School Climate Survey, revealed that three-quarters of LGBTQ* students feel unsafe in at least one place at school, such as change rooms, washrooms, and hallways. Half of straight students agree that at least one part of their school is unsafe for LGBTQ* students. Additionally, 70% of all participants reported hearing expressions such as "That's So Gay" every day in school and almost half reported hearing homophobic remarks². That is why there is a need for GSAs in schools around the country. GSAs work to make schools safer, free of harassment, bullying, isolation, and oppression. They can be advocates and sites for support. It has been found that GSAs reduce the number of students that drop out, run away from home, abuse substances, and die by suicide³. GSAs are also an outlet for allies to support their friends and peers in a safe environment without fear or harassment. Ultimately GSAs make schools safer for all youth, no matter your sexual orientation or gender identity.

Who can be involved in GSAs?

EVERYONE! A GSA is mostly made up of LGBTQ* students and their allies, along with a staff advisor. Keep in mind, if you'd like to make your GSA as inclusive as possible, make sure that it is a space free of homophobia, transphobia, ageism, racism, classism, sexism, and any other forms of discrimination.

Where do GSAs meet?

A GSA will try to meet in the safest space possible. This can be a supportive teacher's classroom, the library, the school's Youth Health Centre, student services, guidance office, etc.

When do GSAs normally meet?

A GSA will typically meet during lunch hour or after school. If students are bused in, lunch hour typically is the most accessible time. When schools are consolidated, sometimes two separate meetings will be held, or two separate GSAs will be formed. Meetings should be regular, once a week or bi-monthly



Definition: Ally. Allies support, nurture and advocate for LGBTQ* individuals and communities. An Ally is a practice, not an identity. It is about what you **do** to make Nova Scotia a safer, happier, and healthier place for the LGBTQ* communities.

Note: The steps were adapted from GLSEN. (2003) The GLSEN Jump-Start Guide. www.glsen.org.

4. How to start a GSA

There are many great resources out there for GSAs - check out the resource section! One of the most comprehensive and helpful guides is from The Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) called, The GLSEN Jumpstart Guide (2003), which has been used to inform many sections throughout this manual, including this next section.

The Initial Steps

These are the basic steps for starting a school club. Each school and school board is different so please keep in mind that you may have to modify these steps to get your GSA started.

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

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

- 2. Find an Advisor**

A GSA Advisor is an LGBTQ* ally that is a school staff member. Supportive staff could be guidance counsellors, nurses, teachers or a Youth Health Centre Coordinator. In fact, Youth Health Centres (YHC) are to support GSA development in each of their schools.

- 3. Inform Administration**

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

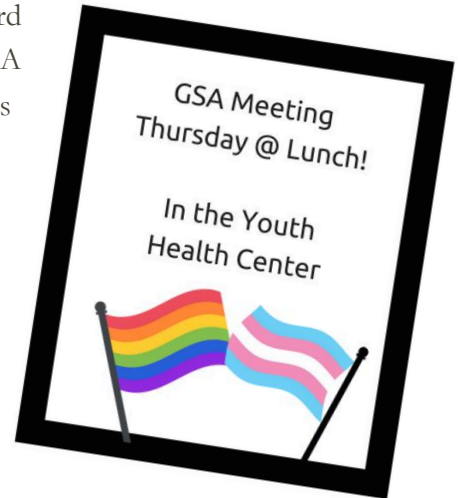
If you meet resistance from administration, contact the School Board for your region and let them know you are unable to start a GSA.

- 4. Find a meeting place**

Pick a space that is accessible and safe. GSAs will typically meet in a guidance office, Youth Health Centre, Student Services office, or an advisor's classroom.

5. Advertise

Use announcements, newsletters, and posters to get the word out! If the GSA needs more momentum getting started, GSA leaders or advisors can speak in classrooms or to other clubs about what a GSA is and why it is important. Make sure to highlight that it isn't the "gay club," but that GSAs are for everyone who is interested in making schools safer for LGBTQ* youth and promoting human rights.



6. Hold your meeting

Time to get started! Check out the next section on what you can do during your first meeting!

7. Sign up to the Youth Project's GSA Network

The GSA Network is a database of GSAs in Nova Scotia on the Youth Project website (www.youthproject.ns.ca). It is a tool that can be used to connect with other GSAs in your region and a way to stay updated on all things Youth Project and GSA related. Make sure to sign up to our newsletter on the GSA Network homepage!



Note: The steps were adapted from GLSEN. (2003) The GLSEN Jump-Start Guide. www.glsen.org.



How to Run a Meeting

1. Create an Agenda

An agenda is a list of things you would like to discuss during your meeting. Everyone can contribute to creating the agenda, but one person should make the list of agenda topics and record what was said about each topic. This is called taking minutes. When you start a meeting it is helpful to go over the meeting minutes from the previous meeting to refresh everyone's memory and to also ensure that any action items were followed through on. Action items are tasks that people volunteer for to complete in a certain period.

Agenda, Meeting Minutes, and Action Items

Example:



Minutes summarize what was said about each agenda item

1. Introductions

2. Terms and Definitions of the Week

- Romantic Orientation
- Asexual
- Demisexual

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

Action items from last week:

- Advertise Dance (Sarah)- She completed this through the display board, morning announcements and posters.
- Buy Decorations (Mr. Smith) - He purchased streamers, balloons, helium tank. He spent \$25.81.

4. Theme for next display board

- John would like to do LGBTQ History month- educational
- Sarah thinks a board for Asexuality Awareness week- raise awareness
- Jess would like an Ally week board- help combat myths about GSAs.

- Vote called: 12 members present, Ally Week won with 7 votes.

Action Item: Jess, Emily, Dante and Sarah will start preparing for the board and bring their findings to the next meeting.

5. Planning for GSA Dance on Thursday

- Josh, Ali, and Beth will decorate for dance on Thursday afternoon
- Sarah and Jess will collect the dance tickets and cash
- Emily and Samantha will prepare the music- send requests their way!
- Mr. Smith will work with the AV club to set up the sound

2. Introductions

Facilitate introductions! Go around the room and ask people to say their name and invite each person to include their pronouns.



By asking for someone's preferred pronoun, you are opening up a space for no assumptions, and that you will use and respect someone else's pronouns. You can also use nametags that display this info.

3. Ice Breakers!

Ice Breakers are helpful activities to get conversation started and help people feel at ease. Check out "Activities and Workshops" section for Ice Breaker ideas!

4. Create Guidelines for your GSA

Guidelines are a list of expectations and behaviours that members of the GSA must adhere to in order to have a positive, comfortable, respectful and safer space. Creating guidelines together helps to ensure that everyone is on the same page. If someone's behaviour is disruptive, they can be reminded of the guidelines. Guidelines should be posted every meeting and at every event. They can be added to and changed at any time based on a group consensus. Some examples of guidelines from GLSEN (2003) include:

- **Respect Others.** When people enter a GSA for the first time they may be hearing about issues that are new to them. It is important to meet people where they are at without judgment and in a respectful manner. If views happen to oppose your own, keep an open mind, listen, and be supportive.

- **Speak for I.** Everyone experiences the world in their own unique way. No one experience is ever truly the same as another. Use statements such as “In my experience...” to talk about your experiences being part of, or working with, the LGBTQ communities.
- **Be Open to New Ideas.** Recognizing and valuing that everyone has different experiences and ideas can truly enrich a GSA. Be open to change!
- **Respect Confidentiality.** When LGBTQ students attend the GSA meetings for the first time it can feel vulnerable and intimidating. Knowing that they are in a safe and confidential place can help alleviate some of their concerns. As a GSA, commit to confidentiality. Do not “out” people in your GSA to students outside of the GSA. When telling stories, do not use identifying characteristics when talking about people, including real names, family situation, grade, etc.
- **Right to Pass.** If you do not feel comfortable speaking, know you always have the right to “pass.”
- **Step Up, Step Back.** While your opinions are important to the group, make sure that you are not the only one contributing to the group. Know when to take a step back.
- **Be Attentive.** Good manners never go out of style. Put away your phones and computers and pay attention to the meeting - Instagram can wait!

5. Discuss when is best to meet in the future

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

6. Assign a meeting facilitator

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

7. Use a speakers list

A speakers list is simply a list of people who would like to talk. For example, let's say your GSA is discussing what activity they would like to do next. If someone is talking about an idea they have, instead of interrupting them to discuss your thoughts, you would put up your hand and be added to the speakers list by a facilitator. The facilitator would go through the list in order of people who were added to it. It is a helpful way for a facilitator to keep track of who would like to speak and helps to prevent people from interrupting, monopolizing conversations, while encouraging people to listen to one another.

5. Fostering Teamwork!

Working together as a team is essential for a GSA to be successful. With homework, exams, social lives and other commitments, it can feel overwhelming to plan GSA events and activities. However, when all GSA members take on responsibilities and share the workload, your GSAs goals become achievable! In this section we will explore what effective team dynamics look like and how you can utilize your GSA team efficiently.

Create the Foundation of Teamwork

Working as a team can come with its challenges. It is important to get off to a good start. Facilitate **Activity 5.1** at the beginning of each school year to make sure that everyone is on the same page as to what makes a team work well together!

Activity 5.1: Foundations of Teamwork

Supplies: Whiteboard and markers

Time: 20-30 minutes

Action: Ask your GSA members, “What makes a team work well together?”

Discussion: Bring up the following elements of team work.

- Open and honest communication
- Active listening
- Working together
- Contributing and participating
- Commitment
- Accountability and Responsibility
- Respect

Brainstorm: What can the GSA members do to ensure these elements of teamwork present in their GSA? What will be some challenges?

Conclusion: A challenge for many GSAs is follow through. Put what you’ve brainstormed into

action! Get started next meeting on implementing some of the suggestions. Just in case you need a little more assistance, here are some of our suggestions how to begin fostering the elements of teamwork:

- Use a talking stick when having meetings
- Develop GSA Guidelines
- Assign Roles and Responsibilities for GSA Members
- Create a culture of self-awareness
 - If people are too busy to take tasks on, make sure they know they can pass.
 - Take time to check in at the beginning of meetings - How is everyone feeling?
 - Don't take on too much as a GSA - Know your limits!

Build Relationships

In order for a GSA to be successful, everyone must work together, taking on different roles, to accomplish the required tasks. If a team is to work well together, they must first build relationships and get to know each other. Establishing relationships between GSA members builds trust, increases communication, and participation.

Icebreakers. Check out the *Icebreakers, Activities, and Workshops* section of the manual for some Icebreaker ideas! Icebreakers are used to get people talking and communicating with each other. Only a little information is typically revealed about each person during icebreakers so your GSA will want to do more to build relationships!

Events for GSA Members. Movie night, crafting, pizza party, bowling, laser tag, camping, a field trip to The Youth Project? These are just a few fun things your GSA can do together! Create memories and have lots of laughs together!

Teamwork Activities. Whether you love them or hate them, team building exercises are a great way to get to know members of your GSA and to learn how you work best together. “Bridge It” is

an excellent activity, which provides your team with the opportunity to work together to achieve a task.

Build Skills

Skills Inventory. Sometimes GSA members do not even realize that they have skills to contribute! EVERYONE has skills! It is important for Advisors and GSAs leaders to know about what their member's strengths and what skills they would like to develop. *Activity 5.2: Skills Inventory* will guide you through the process of starting a Skills Inventory that can even be useful when building your resume!

Activity 5.2: Skills Inventory

Supplies: Paper and markers

Time: 20-30 minutes

Action: Each member of your GSA will individually go through the following checklist and mark what is true for them.

Skills Checklist (Adapted from: 2013, Services for Youth)

Key skills

I can:

- meet deadlines
- supervise others
- solve problems
- teach others and give clear instructions
- manage people
- organize and manage projects
- speak in public
- accept responsibility
- plan daily work or special events
- follow instructions
- generate creative solutions to problem

Hands-on skills

I can:

- assemble kits

- build or repair things
- work well with my hands
- drive or operate vehicles

Data/information skills

I can:

- make a budget, manage money
- record facts, classify information by date
- analyze data, audit and maintain records
- check information for accuracy
- pay attention to details
- investigate and clarify results
- locate answers, gather information
- calculate or compute
- take inventory
- keep financial records
- research and write reports

Leadership skills

I can:

- arrange meetings or social functions
- be competitive when necessary
- make decisions
- direct the work of others
- help set goals for my team
- explain things to others
- solve problems
- motivate people
- settle disagreements
- plan activities and put them into action
- take risks when necessary
- organize and chair a meeting
- show self-confidence

People skills

I can:

- help and care for others
- manage conflicts, resolve issues
- counsel people

- be tactful and diplomatic
- interview people
- be kind and understanding
- be a good listener
- negotiate
- be outgoing
- show patience
- be pleasant and sociable
- supervise, teach
- be tough when necessary
- trust people
- trust my instincts

Creative/artistic skills

I can:

- be artistic
- write short stories or articles
- draw or create other art
- express myself through music, poetry, or art
- design posters, draw cartoons and illustrations
- perform and act
- present artistic ideas
- dance, create body movement
- use computers to create presentations
- design and layout Web pages

Verbal/communication skills

I can:

- clearly express myself
- talk easily with others
- create and talk about new ideas
- design presentations
- be inventive
- conduct research in a library or on the Internet
- set up my own network of experts or helpers
- be logical
- speak in public
- write clear and concise reports
- work well with others

Discussion: How do these skills translate to working well in a GSA? What skills complement GSA roles and responsibilities? What skills does each GSA member want to build upon individually?

Brainstorm: What roles would each GSA member like to take on based on their skills inventory? What are some ways that each GSA member can build skills (ie. Workshops by community organizations, attending youth conferences and seminars etc.)

Conclusion: The process of building skills is continuous and requires effort and practice. Even if something doesn't come easily, keep trying!



Tip for Advisors and GSA leaders: GSA leaders that have been part of the GSA the longest have institutional knowledge and skills that help to keep a GSA functioning. While this knowledge is important and easy to rely on, it can limit and diminish the contributions of other members and impact the ability of a team to work well together.

Make sure that leadership opportunities are provided to ALL interested youth. GSAs provide an opportunity for skill building and should not be limited to one or two people. Advisors, make sure that GSA leaders are not preventing opportunities for other youth who may be afraid to voice their interest.

Conflict Resolution

GSAs often bring together a very diverse group of people with a range of experiences and personalities. When conflict occurs, it can create a divisive environment, impede effective team work, and in the worst cases cause a GSA to fail completely.

Work with a mediator, such as your GSA advisor or school counsellor. Set a time to address the conflict. Review the steps for conflict resolution and come prepared to the meeting. The following steps are outlined by the National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Centre (2002):

Steps to Conflict Resolution

1. Set the stage. Agree to try to work together to find a solution peacefully, and establish ground rules (e.g., no name-calling, blaming, yelling, or interrupting).

2. Gather perspectives. Each person describes the dispute from their perspective, without interruption. Listeners pay close attention and then ask clarifying questions in a nonthreatening manner. They consider not only what the other participants say they want, but why they want it. For example, if someone insists that you pay for something they believe you broke, they may be doing so not because they really care about the object or the money, but because they feel that you don't respect them. Addressing the other person's need to feel respected may be key to resolving the conflict.

3. Find common interests. Establish which facts and issues all participants agree on and determine why different issues are important to each person. Identify common interests, which can be as simple as a mutual desire to resolve the problem without a shared need to save face.

4. Create options. Take time to brainstorm about possible solutions to the problem. Come up with a list of options without immediately judging them or feeling committed to them. Try to think of solutions where both people gain something - think win/win! Too often we assume that for one person to win, the other person has to lose. In reality, it is often possible to think creatively and come up with a solution that both people feel good about, where both walk away feeling that their needs have been met.

5. Evaluate options. After a number of options are suggested, each person involved discusses their feelings about each of the proposed solutions. Participants will negotiate and often will need to compromise in order to reach a conclusion that is acceptable to both. They may need to agree to disagree about some issues to reach an understanding.

6. Create an agreement. Each person involved explicitly state their agreement and may even want to write it down. If necessary, they set up a time to check back to see how the agreement is working.

The mediator will often check in a few weeks and months afterwards to ensure that all parties are following the agreement. If the agreement is not working for everyone, an additional meeting may be held and the agreement revised.



6. Now What? How to keep your GSA running!

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

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

The following tips towards developing a mission statement have been compiled and/or adapted from a variety of resources ^{5,6,7,8}.

Create a mission statement

- 1) A mission statement should say what you are, what you do, what you stand for, and why you do it.



Social, Support, Advocacy, Education

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

- 2) A mission statement is not a slogan, goal, action plan, ad or public relations piece.
- 3) Most mission statements tend to be a few precisely written sentences
- 4) Effective mission statements usually takes 2 to 4 meetings to develop. This time allows for input and final editing.
- 5) Examine other mission statements to get ideas for your own. Check out the Youth Project's GSA Network for some examples.
- 6) Avoid humour and sarcasm. Simplicity, frankness and inclusivity are key components to a mission statement

- 7) You might want to identify a problem or condition being worked on.
- 8) Finally an effective mission statement is best developed with input by all members of the GSA. Even if certain members think it is silly or have no ideas (both are common) they will later understand the concept more if their opinion is recognized.

Activity 5.1: Your mission is...

Activity: Creating a Mission Statement

Supplies: Markers and Flip Chart Paper

Time: 30 minutes

Prep: On four pieces of flip chart paper write:

“What is our GSA?”

“What will our GSA do?”

“What does our GSA stand for?”

“Why is it important?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mission Statement Examples:

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

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

Assign roles

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

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

Co-Chairs or President

Co-chairs or Presidents are the leaders of the GSA. It is their role and responsibility to keep the GSA moving forward, using their mission statement as a guide. They must guide meetings, hold other members accountable for completing tasks, and work closely with school administration and advisors.

1. Attend meetings

- Attend on time
- Respond to action items in a timely manner as required
- Provide input
- Keep meetings focused
- Be positive and welcoming
- Welcome new members

2. Agendas

- Set draft agendas prior to meetings
- Ensure someone takes meeting minutes
- Review last meeting's minutes before every meeting in order to know what needs to be discussed

3. Set meeting dates in advance

- Let everyone know if there are changes
- Be consistent, meet on a regular basis

4. When event planning

- Set additional meetings when prepping for an event
- Write out task lists and assign duties to other members
- Check in and reassign duties if tasks are not being completed by set dates
- Work with Treasurer and make sure that events are within the budget
- Work with the Event Coordinator, make sure event has been approved by administration and that duties have been assigned

Secretary

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

1. Attend meetings and write minutes

- Attend on time
- Respond to action items in a timely manner as required
- Follow the agenda and make sure to record what action is to be taken in regard to agenda items
- Give out copies of meeting minutes to other members

2. Keep copies of minutes, posters, resources, etc. that your GSA may want to use in the future

Treasurer

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

1. Attend meetings

- Attend on time
- Respond to action items in a timely manner as required

2. Keep track of funds, whether they are provided by the school or from fundraising initiatives

- Keep a notebook specifically for the GSA financials
- Track revenue (money that your GSA has) and expenses (money your GSA has spent)
- For example:

Events	Revenue	Expenses	Total
Fundraiser	\$500		
Pizza Party		-\$50	
Total			\$450

3. In some cases, a GSA might have their own bank account, which means you'll have to make deposits and write cheques for those who spent money on events etc.

- Keep track of expenses in the same way outlined above, but make sure to hold onto all associated paper work for at least 7 years
- Order cheques for your GSA

Event Coordinator(s)

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

1. Attend meetings

- Attend on time
- Respond to action items in a timely manner as required
- Provide input

2. Work with GSA members to decide the type of event, date, location, theme, decorations etc.

- Seeking approval from administration should be your first step
- Are you going to need additional permission? Ask your advisor.

3. Plan with Co-Chairs or President what tasks will need to be completed for events

- Attend the event meetings and report progress of planning

4. The day of the event, coordinate where set up will be, volunteer roles, and take down

- Don't do it all by yourself, make sure you find volunteers to help you the day of!

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

Educate Yourself

- Know terms and definitions related to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity. Check out the *Terms and Definitions* section of this manual
- Use appropriate language
- Don't make assumptions about folks that attend GSA
- Don't be afraid to ask someone what their pronouns are and in what spaces you are allowed to use their preferred pronoun (You might be able to in the GSA but not in the rest of the school as someone who is trans might not be out)

Keep in mind that not all GSAs look the same and that the roles outlined might not work for you. For example, you might want to have an event planning committee, rather than a single coordinator. Do what works best with your GSA members and have fun with it!

Plan your school year

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

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

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

If you have too many ideas...

- Start to pare down what you'd like to achieve in the school year! See *Activity 5.2: Ready, set, GO!*

Activity 5.2: Ready, Set, GO!

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

Supplies: Markers and Flip Chart Paper

Time: 30 minutes

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

Discussion: As a group, discuss what you can realistically achieve each month, semester, school year. It is important for each students and advisor to keep in mind other commitments with school work, other clubs, and extracurricular activities.

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

Action: Every student in the GSA will grab a marker and put a mark by the project or event they would like to do, limiting the number of marks they have to the number of projects the group can

commit to. For example, if you GSA can commit to 6 projects for the school year, each student will be able to select, or put a mark, by 6 projects or events they are interested in. In the end, the projects and events with the most marks beside them will be what your GSA works on!

Plan projects that meet the goals of your GSA!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Making Decisions

There are different systems that your GSA can use to make decisions.

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

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

Create a Timeline

Create your own GSA Calendar

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



Planning, prep, events - what about support?

Many GSAs are interested in advocacy and awareness in their schools, but not all GSA members are there for those reasons. Some are in need of support and a safer space. In order to meet the needs of all their members, GSAs often have two meetings a week. One meeting is for planning and one is purely for support, socializing, and hanging out!

Project & Event Planning

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

- 1. Ensure your project or event aligns with your S.M.A.R.T. Goals**

See “Start Planning” for more information about S.M.A.R.T. Goals.

- 2. Create a timeline**

Create a calendar for your GSA and plan out each month and each school year. In the *Resource* section you will find blank Calendar templates. Use these templates to not only plan out your events but also your meetings.

- 3. Create a supply list as a team**

Outline what will you need for your event? Plan for the best, prepare for the worst! Bring more than you need if you are leaving your school. Buy slightly more than you need if you are making food, swag bags, or any other sort of take away. Make sure to assign people to buy the supplies and bring them!

- 4. Assign Tasks**

Everyone who is interested should be given the opportunity to take on tasks in order to adequately prepare for your event! Outline what needs to be done and when it needs to be done by. Add this information to your GSA Calendar and record it in your meeting minutes. Co-chairs or GSA advisors should check in regularly with members to ensure that tasks are being completed. If members are not completing tasks, use the check-in to find out what additional supports they may need or if the task needs to be reassigned to someone else.

- 1. Work within your Budget**

Some GSAs are given more money than others by their school's administration, but did you know that GSAs are entitled to money as a school club? Every student pays fees at the beginning of the school year, which are then divided up among student groups and clubs. Ask your administration for funding if they haven't provided you with any!

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

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

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

2. **Advertise**

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

3. **Joint Projects**

A persistent myth is that GSAs are only for gay students. One strategy to combat this myth is to partner with other school clubs or groups. Work together to determine which group will be responsible for outlined tasks and how each group will financially contribute.

1. **Ensure your events are inclusive of everyone!**

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

Consider having an ASL (American Sign Language) translator present if your school has students with various hearing levels or if you are inviting guests in from the community.

Space: Ensure that your event space is wheelchair accessible.

Content: Explore other elements of diversity in your project including race, ethnicity, age, and ability. Check out *Challenging Stereotypes: Exploring the Complexity of Identities* for more information on inclusion and representation.

Financial Accessibility: Free events mean that everyone who is interested can participate! If you are unable to make your event free, consider offering a pay-what-you-can option.

1. **Work on your project during GSA meetings**

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



Buttons!

Did you know that the Youth Projects has a button maker we lend to GSAs for free? You just have to make it down to the Youth Project on Brunswick Street to pick it up if you are outside of the HRM.

Executing the Project or Event

1. **Create supply checklists**

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

2. **Pack your supplies in advance**

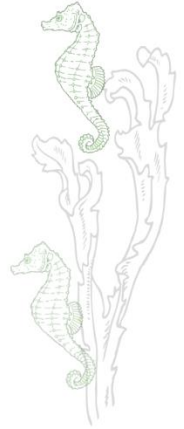
Having all of the supplies in easy to carry packs can save a lot of time and make sure you don't forget anything the day of the event. Make sure you have everything! Things like tape may seem like a no brainer, but can be overlooked when people get busy.

3. **Give yourself lots of time to set up**

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

4. Be outgoing and engaging!

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



Projects, Events, and Fundraisers

Need some project and event ideas for your GSA? We have lots to get your GSA started and to keep it going! ¹

Projects

Campaign to create gender neutral washrooms and changing spaces in your school!

Your school can make a single-stall restroom accessible to students of any gender. Speak with teachers and students about the importance of gender neutral washrooms or the silliness of assigning a gender to a washroom with only one stall. Write a proposal to the principal and let them understand that students of any sex or gender identity want a safe space to use the washroom.

Create a bulletin board where you highlight influential LGBTQ people.

Represent the LGBTQ* community by showing students successful LGBTQ role models in media and within the local community. Seeing themselves represented in their school community can have a great impact on the wellbeing of LGBTQ students. Every little bit helps! Some themes to try posting include: “LGBTQ Person of the Week”, “Current Events Impacting the LGBTQ Community”, or “LGBTQ in the Media”.

Create a GSA video

A video can be a great medium to show your school what it is like being part of the GSA and highlight some of the work you do. Your school may have policies on video taken within the school so make sure you speak with a teacher or administrator prior to this project.

Paint a Mural - GSA, hand prints, outside, in the GSA office

Murals are a great way to always have a presence in your school. Just be sure to get permission!

¹ Project and Event ideas taken from: GLSEN. (2001). 20 ways your GSA can rock the world. ; GSA Network Document; and all the great ideas from GSAs around Nova Scotia!

Get teachers to join Ally Network or start your own Ally Card Program

The Ally Network is a great resource for all of the adults at your school. Your GSA can write fact sheets or testimonials on how having allies in their lives can help. The Ally Network can give information and workshops on how to be better allies to LGBTQ* students, resources for definitions and the newest events at The Youth Project. The Ally Network also gives members an Ally card and pin to display in their office or classroom and access to other Allies in the community. Visit youthproject.ns.ca/ally to 'Become a Member' and sign up!

Outline your GSAs history

Keeping track of the events and projects you do over the year can help future generations of GSAs at your school. If there ever comes a time when all members of the GSA graduate or move schools it is important to have an outline for what to do. It is also a great idea to have a record of the things your GSA accomplished so when the school looks back years from now they can see history being made!

Assess your School's Climate

What is it like for LGBTQ* people at your school? Do the anti-discrimination policies include sexual orientation and gender identity? Are LGBTQ topics and people discussed in other classes, such as English or History? Is inclusive language used in all subject areas to make your school's classrooms safer spaces? Are athletic programs welcoming spaces for LGBTQ and gender-nonconforming students? (Taken from Egale 2012 "mygsa.ca")*

Review Policies

What are the policies in place for overnight trips, change rooms, gendered activities in gym class, washrooms, and anti-discrimination? Are they inclusive to all students? What can be changed to make them better? Go over these policies with school administration and let them know where and why these policies should be changed.

Transgender Day of Remembrance/Trans Awareness Week

November 20th is the Transgender Day of Remembrance to honor and mourn those who have been killed due to being gender variant in some way; there is often a vigil to mark this day. It has recently

expanded to an awareness week in November, to draw attention to transgender issues. As a GSA this is a great time to focus on issues transgender students face, read stories by transgender authors, create displays about transgender people in history and the media, and highlight just how many transgender people have contributed to society.

Collect LGBTQ books for your school library.

Discuss with your school librarian the possibility of creating and LGBTQ* space in your school's library. Local community organizations might donate LGBTQ friendly books to your library. The Youth Project has an online book list you can use as a starting point!

Celebrate educational themed months

Have your GSA celebrate an educational themed month and give it an LGBTQ twist. This is a great way to show the intersections of being LGBTQ and other aspects of life, like Black History Month (February), Aboriginal History Month (June), Human Rights Day (December 10th) and more. You can have speakers come in that relate to the month who also identify as LGBTQ, to give a perspective that it intersectional. You can also do these throughout the year, and not just the designated month!

Mentor local Junior High GSA

GSAs can be difficult to start up or keep up if you don't know where to start. Having a mentor during this process can be a great help and give the students a chance to look forward to high school.

Make T-Shirts or Swag Bags

Draw or design them yourselves and give them away, or use them to help raise funds for your group's projects. You can also use it as a team building activity and use them as uniforms when

running events! They can have anything on them, from rainbows to quotes about positivity and acceptance.

Launch a Ribbon Campaign

A ribbon campaign involves inviting others to wear a ribbon to show their support. Often rainbow ribbons can be worn for LGBTQ+ support. You can give them away, or invite students and staff to participate in something to earn a ribbon (like a Stop Homophobia pledge, or adding their support to a wall display of signatures or positive quotes).

Advocate to include LGBTQ issues in the curriculum

Examine the curriculum your teachers are using, and brainstorm ways they could include LGBTQ people, events, or topics in the lesson plan. Go subject by subject and then distribute the results of your brainstorm to the teachers. There are organisations such as GLSEN that have LGBTQ curriculums that can help you with this process.

Create posters to advertise your GSA

Advertise your GSA meetings, local support centers or rally to raise awareness about LGBTQ issues, such as Transgender Day of Remembrance or LGBTQ History month.

Events

Attend local rallies

It can be fun to make change! Check out what rallies or protests may be going on in your community, you can learn a lot and get ideas to plan your own. A few to look out for are International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia, National Coming Out Day, and The Day of Silence.

Host a diversity day / Pride Day

This activity is great if you already have a diversity club in existence. Get together with other diversity clubs in the school (or other students in general) and plan an event like an assembly, showcase night, or diversity fair. This can include keynote speakers, workshops, entertainment, or

information tables, bake sales, interactive art, or inviting students to participate by wearing rainbow colours or signing a pledge to stand up to homophobia. Building connections with various school groups can be a great way to meet new people, explore ideas, and raise awareness about LGBTQ issues and intersectionality at your school!

(See section 10 on Challenging Stereotypes to learn more on intersectionality)

LGBTQ dance

Dances can be a great way to bring GSA members together but they can require a lot of planning. You might want to invite other GSAs and have them help plan too! This is a great way to reach out to other schools and get to know more people in the community. If you don't want to plan your own dance, look into dances that you can attend as a group (like The Youth Project's Queer Prom!).

Bring in LGBTQ speakers and workshop facilitators

Many groups invite speakers or guests from the local community to discuss different issues. A speaker may come in to talk to your class, at a GSA meeting, or a school-wide event. There are a number of community groups that could be invited, including NSRAP (Nova Scotia Rainbow Action Project), PFLAG (Parents and friends of Lesbians and Gays), the AIDS coalition of Nova Scotia and of course The Youth Project!

Host an LGBTQ Movie Night

You can borrow an LGBT themed movie from the Youth Project or rent one in your community and host a movie night! Make sure to think about movies that will include everyone. For example, if you show a trans* themed movie in the first semester, try to host a gay/lesbian/bi focused movie in the second semester.

Potluck

A potluck can be held at your school during lunch hour for your GSA, but also consider inviting other GSAs in your community to an event at a local park or in someone's backyard. A Facebook group can be made so people can see what everyone is planning to take. Be sure to be inclusive by having vegetarian, vegan, and lactose free options. Also be sure to ask about allergies!

GSA Calendar

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

September

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

Bisexual Awareness Week - the week before Celebrate Bisexuality Day.

October

LGBTQ History Month

11th - National Coming Out Day

19th - Spirit Day: a means of speaking out against LGBTQ bullying and standing with LGBTQ youth.

26th - Intersex Awareness Day

Asexuality Awareness Week: late October

November

Transgender Awareness Week

20th - Transgender Day of Remembrance

December

1st - World AIDS Day

10th - Human Rights Day

February

14th - Pink Triangle Day

March

31st - International Day of Transgender Visibility

Bisexual Health Awareness Month

April

10th - Day of Silence

May

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

June & July

Pride Months!

Queer Prom: Late June

Pride events: Mid-July

Fundraisers

School Car Wash

Students, teachers and parents alike may be happy to get their cars cleaned for a good cause. So let's have a car wash on the high school parking lot in the summertime! With a couple of volunteers, a bucket of water and a sponge, you can turn dirty cars clean – and an empty cash box into a full one.

Find out how much a car wash usually costs in your area so customers won't be deterred by your price, and make sure your volunteers know what they're doing.

Coffee House

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

Bring Your Own Banana Ice Cream Bar

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

All in all, a high school is a great place for fundraising. You rarely get so many people eager for excitement in one place, so get permission and get going!

Ice Breakers, Activities & Workshops

Icebreakers

M&M game! (Stevens, 2009)

Pour M&Ms or any other multicoloured candy into a bowl. Have everyone in the group grab as much or as little as they like from the bowl. Make sure that no one eats their candy right away. For each piece of M&M candy they took, they will have to say one interesting fact about themselves. Go around the room until everyone has shared interesting facts about themselves. This game can also be played with toilet paper and for each sheet a person takes, they have to say one fact about themselves.

Move your butt! (Stevens, 2009)

Set up chairs in a circle, count the number of people that are playing and make sure everyone has a chair except for one person. That person will stand in the center and say something that is true about themselves (“I have a dog,” “I walk to school,” “I like being in GSA”). If it also applies to the people sitting down, they must get up and find a new chair*. They must be quick, because there will always be one less chair – so there will always be someone in the middle! That person has to stand in the center and say something else true about them, and continue the game. Continue this until you want to move on to the next activity.

*You cannot move into the chair right next to you, or sit in the same chair you got up from.

Celebrity ID game! (Stevens, 2009)

The Celebrity ID Game is a good way to get a large group to mingle and break the ice by interacting with lots of people rapidly. To set up, the moderator prepares several labels with famous celebrity or well-known names (Mickey Mouse, Madonna, David Suzuki, etc. Try to make them LGBTQ celebrities!). The moderator sticks a label on each person's back. Then, the moderator announces it is time for the game to begin. At this point everybody mingles and introduces themselves to each other. Each person asks yes or no questions to gain clues about the name. When a person correctly identifies the name, he or she removes the label and continues to mingle until a preset amount of time.

General Activities

Plan Outdoor Activities (Stevens, 2009)

Have your meeting outside! Make it a BBQ, play games that involve physical activity! Or even have a GSA picnic with blankets and food – feel free to go the whole 9 yards! Maybe even make it an event with other GSAs or other clubs in your school.

Bring in books and newspaper articles about LGBT people in the media. (Stevens, 2009)

Talk and discuss them in your GSA meetings.

Arts and Crafts (Stevens, 2009)

Get together after school or during lunch and make your own pride gear or a banner to use for advertising! Decorating things like t-shirts or art to display around the school is always a fun activity!

Team Building Activities

Bridge It (The Food Project, 2016)

This activity is best for groups who have some experience working together.

GROUP SIZE: 6 or more

TIME REQUIRED: 30-45 minutes

DIRECTIONS:

- Divide the participants into two groups of “construction workers.”
- Give each group an identical bag of construction materials. This can include canvas tarp, construction materials, such as pipes and connectors or newspapers, tape and straws, or lots of amusing recycled junk that doesn’t necessarily have a name. Divide this equally so both groups will have identical supplies and put the supplies in paper bags.
- Using these materials each group must build half a bridge that begins on their side of the space and meets in the middle of the space with the other half of the bridge built by the other. Each half of the bridge must mirror the other exactly.
- Place a tarp between the groups so they can’t see each other’s work. Groups must verbally communicate building techniques through the tarp so that they match and meet in the middle. They cannot touch the tarp.
- When groups think they have accomplished the task, remove the tarp and see how close they are.

DISCUSSION: This activity requires imagination, careful planning and good communication.

- What was the most challenging thing about this activity?
- How many people were responsible for communicating between the teams?
- Would it have worked better if only one or more than one had been doing the communication?
- How clear did the communicator have to be? Where did miscommunication happen? How could this have been avoided? What were creative ways that the groups used to communicate things to one another? (i.e. height/width of the bridge, where on the tarp it would meet etc.)
- How important was preplanning to the success of the activity? Did you need to experiment with bridge design before deciding on a technique?
- Did one person take a leadership role? What other roles were important?

HINT: It may benefit the group to have a mandatory planning time.

OPTIONS:

- With a very low functioning group, have them set up on opposite sides of a marked area in sight of each other.
- To further challenge them, make only one person on each side a “communicator” or limit communication to notes written on paper.
- If the facilitator can see that the groups are not going to be successful, the facilitator can allow one person from each team to have a 15 second look at what the other team is doing.
- To make this even more challenging provide some additional construction materials to only one of the teams

GROG (FT, 2008)

For this activity, you need a building that is conducive to running and hiding. The only equipment you need is a flashlight.

DIRECTIONS:

One person is the Game Captain and is in charge of overseeing the game.

Prior to the game, the Game Captain (GC) needs to go through the play area. In our church, we go around and turn on various Sunday School classroom lights. The doors to these rooms are closed, and those rooms are off limits. (We have classroom doors with windows, so the light shines out into the hall, giving us enough light to play. If this does not work for your play area, you need to figure out how to have a low level of light.)

The GC takes the flashlight apart into at least 3 pieces - the barrel, the battery, and the lens - and hides these pieces throughout the play area. Since the environment is somewhat dark, we tend to hide them in places that are not too very hard to find.

Once that is done, the GC goes back to the group and selects the GROG. The GROG is a creature of the dark, and goes into the dim play area to hide.

The GROG's goal is to tag the other players, like freeze tag, and render them inactive. The GROG is trying to capture all of the players. There is no base. If the frozen player is tagged by another player, they can become active players again.

The players' objective is to find the flashlight and assemble it. Only the light of the flashlight will put an end to the GROG's existence. Once the players find the pieces of the flashlight and get it working, they go on a GROG hunt. Shining the light on the GROG, or freezing all of the players, ends the game.

NOTES: If you have a large group, divide them into a couple of groups by age and size. You don't want bigger players tearing down a hallway and crashing into a smaller player. Also, warn the players not to run "all out" for the same reason. We encourage the players not to talk, etc., when they are frozen.

Flip the Duck (The Food Project, 2016)

IMPACT: Challenges all group members to use cooperation, strategy, and creativity; energizes the group.

GROUP SIZE: 5-15

TIME REQUIRED: 10- 20 minutes

DIRECTIONS:

Ask all participants to get in a circle. Hand them the sheet, and ask everyone to hold onto the edge with two hands and stretch it out flat in the air, not on the ground. Place the duck in the center of the sheet. The mission is to get the duck to the other side of the sheet without letting it fall on the ground.

DISCUSSION: How many different ideas did the group try before solving the challenge? Why were some less successful than others? Was everyone able to hold onto the sheet when the duck successfully switched to the other side? Did everyone participate on all the attempts? • What type of solution worked the best – slow and careful or fast and risky? Use these to draw parallels to group dynamics, how to approach new situations, etc.

OPTION: Try this with a soft ball that rolls to make it more challenging

Workshops

Constellations of Gender

Originally done by: Anya Gwynne

Peterborough AIDS Network (anya@parn.ca)

Group size will depend on space available to use

Components:

- Introduction, interactive discussion (videos)
- Theater & movement exercise
- Art activity (constellations of gender)

This is an exercise for examining masculinity, femininity, and the roles of gender.

Write/display the word “Masculinity” on the board/screen. Invite the group to contribute words that reflect our cultural norms for masculinity. What qualities do we expect from masculinity? Name them as a group and write them on the board.

Do the same for the word “Femininity”. What qualities do we expect from femininity? Name them as a group and write them on the board.

If time allows, show the videos:

Guante - “10 Responses to the Phrase ‘Man Up’”:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QFoBaTkPgco>

Lily Myers - “The Shrinking Woman”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zQucWXXp3k>

Invite the group to think about the themes of bodies, gender, and gender expectations. How do these videos impact us? How do these cultural norms impact us?

Where do we hold the tension of these gendered expectations?

[Theater Activity]

Invite the group to stand. This activity will require walking or moving around; ensure you have adequate space to do so.

Tell the group we are going to look at gender and how we embody it, sometimes without even thinking about it. It’s going to look at gender on a spectrum, and how we fit into it. We all fit

somewhere on this spectrum, and it's okay to be who we are. But we are going to look at gender expression using movement.

Indicate the farthest point of the room. That point of the room represents femininity, the most feminine that we can think of.

Point to the other side of the room. That point of the room represents masculinity, the most masculine that we can think of.

The rest of the space in the room between the two points is a spectrum. It ranges from the most feminine we can think of, to the most masculine we can think of.

The group is going to walk from one end of the room to the other. They will do this together. They are going to alter their 'walk', the way they move their bodies, and how they express movement, according to which section of the room they are on. Ask them to walk in the most feminine ways possible, and the most masculine. As they cross the room, ask them to pay attention to when their 'walks', or ways of movement, change. As they cross the floor, from feminine or masculine (or vice versa), their movement will change in different ways. Ask them to note the ways as they move.

Cross the floor a few times. Change pacing (super slow-motion, regular speed, faster) to get to them to acknowledge when their walks change.

After crossing the floor a few times, ask them to start from one end, and then stop when they feel themselves slip into THEIR OWN way of walking and expression, the way they usually move (Often that will be somewhere in the middle).

Debrief:

- Was it different walking in the 'feminine' way versus the 'masculine'? What did you change? What did others change?
- How did it feel to change from one side of the room to the other? Was it comfortable or uncomfortable, and why?
- Where do you hold tension when you walk in the feminine spectrum? Where do you hold it in the masculine?
- Where did you stop in the spectrum?
- [If most people are in the middle of the spectrum] What does that tell us about either end of it? These hyper-masculine and -feminine standards are hard to keep up and some of us feel more comfortable somewhere in the middle.

Note: Allow for group to explore feelings of both comfort and discomfort. It is important to allow for the ways gender influences our comfort levels and the ways it makes us discomforted or unsure. No feeling in this activity is necessarily a bad thing to have. Avoid tying negative characteristics to

gender expression, or generalizing experiences.

Charting Activity – Constellations of Gender

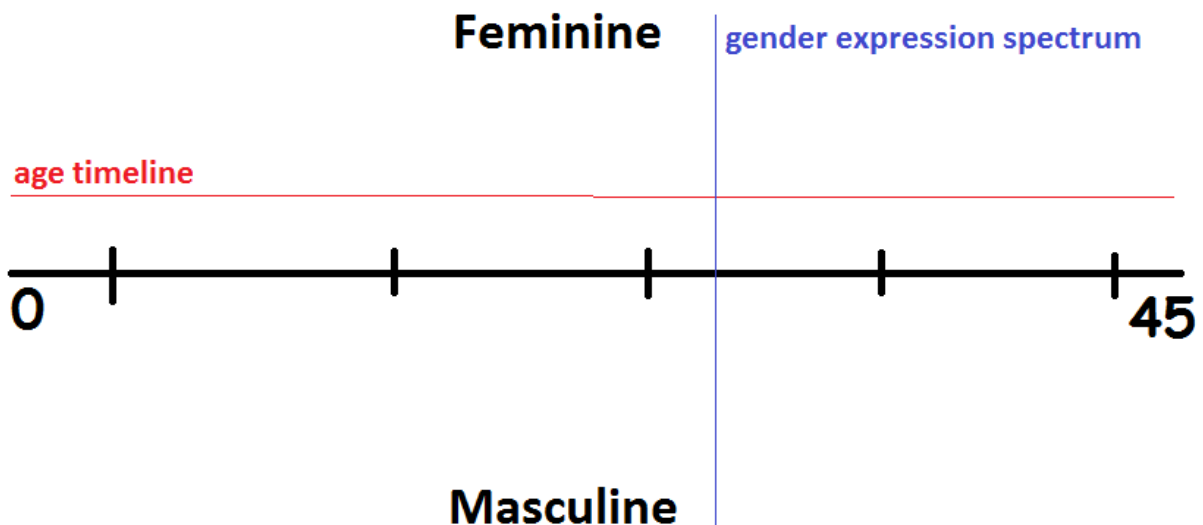
Each participant gets a piece of flipchart paper, markers and art supplies if desired.

Each person is going to ‘chart’ the constellation of their gender. Get them to recall the beginning activities – thinking about gender roles and expectations of others and of our culture. Think also about the theater activity, and from finding ourselves on a spectrum of gender expression.

Ask each person to create a timeline of their life in a way that makes sense to them. This could be by age, significant life events, or whatever ‘milestones’ that make the most sense. Age is often the easiest to track over time.

To this timeline, they are going to add an axis of gender expression. This could be from Masculine to Feminine, or whatever gender ‘spectrum’ makes sense to them.

A suggested model could be:



They are going to plot out three different trajectories, or stories:

1. **Your own experience of your gender and gender expression.**

NOTE: We are not NOT charting gender identity or sexual orientation (although if that ties into our stories, that is okay!). What we are looking at is our own experience of our sense of

gender, and how that may have changed over time. We all could move along the spectrum of masculinity or femininity whether we are LGB or straight, transgender or cisgender. Do not worry about these labels in your process.

2. The expectations of others as related to your gender expression

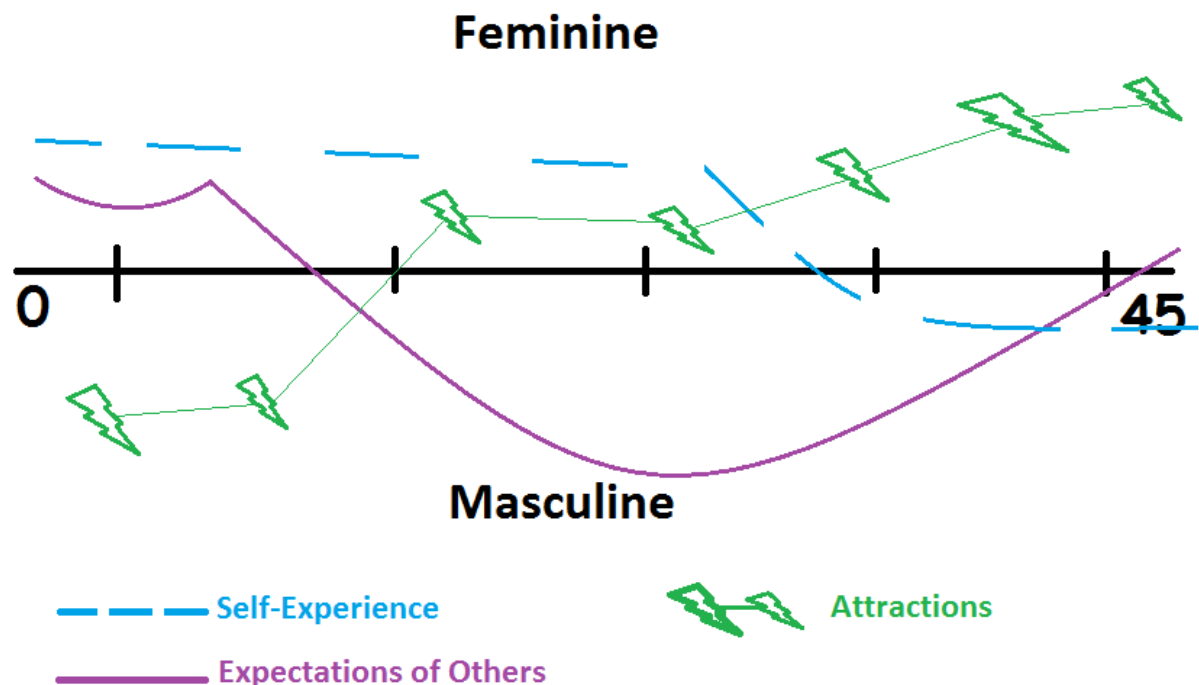
What have other people expected from you in terms of your gender expression? Have they expected you to always be a certain way? Have the expectations of others changed in your life?

3. Your attractions to a sense of masculinity or femininity

This could be in yourself, in your friends, or in your partners. It could be the people you are attracted to, or your own sense of attraction, but it does not have to be that. What kinds of gender expression or gender are you attracted to, drawn to, or that appeals to you?

Give adequate time for this activity. Allow people to think about it and then plot out these three separate stories. Encourage them to use different colours, materials, etc to differentiate between these elements.

A finished product could look like this:



Invite individuals to share their stories with the larger group if there is time, or get them to partner up in small groups to share if they want. Sharing is encouraged to demonstrate that:

- Changes to gender expression happen for all of us, and nobody's story is obvious by just looking at them. We should avoid snap judgments based on anyone's gender expression because we never know someone's story.
- We all have a unique constellation of gender, and different ways we have arrived at ourselves.
- This 'travelling' around a spectrum is normal for every person, no matter our sexual orientation or gender identity, because gender is complicated. We live in a culture that doesn't allow us to move along a spectrum even though every person moves in some way.



How to make your GSA Trans-Inclusive



What does Transgender mean?

The term transgender describes people whose gender identity and/or expression does not match their sex assigned at birth.

Transgender is an umbrella term that can include many variations of gender identity and/or expression. The term transgender is sometimes used to describe people who identify as transman, transwoman, genderqueer, gender non-conforming or non-binary.

What does it mean to be Trans-inclusive?


Being trans-inclusive means that your GSA and its members commit to an ongoing process of education, and that you make an effort to ensure that all of your activities and advocacy efforts are inclusive of transgender people and issues related to gender identity.

Why is it important for student clubs to be Trans-Inclusive?

Gender-based discrimination affects everyone. Protecting everyone's right to express their gender in the way that makes them feel the most comfortable should be important to everyone who wants to make their school a safer space. Not all youth are aware of their sexual orientation, but boys still get called names for acting too girly, and girls who act like boys are also labeled negatively. Much of the harassment that occurs in school hallways and on playgrounds is an attack on gender expression and/or identity whether as a tomboy, a feminine guy, a trans-identified person or anyone who does not conform to gender norms. An increased awareness of the issues that transgender people face only helps us to in our goal to eliminate gender based oppression from our schools for everyone.

GSAs can be a powerful force in the fight against discrimination on the basis of gender identity and gender nonconformity. Despite the fact that these issues are often at the root of homophobic harassment and bullying, many GSAs have not yet addressed gender/transgender issues because they do not know how to go about it.

Suggestions to make your GSA more trans-friendly

1. **What's your GSA's name?** Although your GSA may be trans-inclusive in a number of ways, the term Gender and Sexuality Alliance means everyone is welcome. Make sure your name reflects everyone in the LGBTQ acronym. Be creative and have fun with it!
2. **If your GSA asks for gender on a form or a survey, don't use checkboxes with "Male" or "Female". Leave a blank line and allow people to write it in.** This allows people to identify however they would like. Always question if you even need this information and why you are asking for it. If you do decide to include a question about gender, consider noting that sharing this info is optional. Consider sharing this information with your school for their forms as well.
3. **Create a safe space for self-identification.** Make it a rule in your GSA that anyone can use their name and pronoun of choice, and other members will respect and use them. Make sure you know **when** and **where** people use these names and pronouns (just in the GSA? Just at school? Do their parents or teachers use them too?). Respect their confidentiality if these are just identities they use only at GSA meetings – it may be their only place to do so comfortably. Name-tags that include pronouns, or pronoun buttons or stickers are a great way to keep everyone on track.
4. **Advocate for gender-neutral spaces in your school.** Places like washrooms, changing rooms and locker rooms can be unsafe, uncomfortable places for people who are transgender. While everyone has the right to be safe in every place at school, some people will find a gender-neutral space safer and more accessible, and it may allow them to participate in activities and events they may otherwise stay away from.
5. **Don't separate your GSA into "boys" and "girls" for activities.** For some this may seem harmless, but for a student who is trans, or questioning their gender, this can be an alienating and even traumatizing situation. Challenge yourself to notice the ways that you gender things and ask yourself why. Consider reasons that gendering activities might be problematic for trans as well as non-trans participants.
6. **Design and lead a gender sensitivity training for students and/or teachers at your school.** Get folks talking about gender categories and gender-related expectations (What do

we expect from women and men? Are they different?).

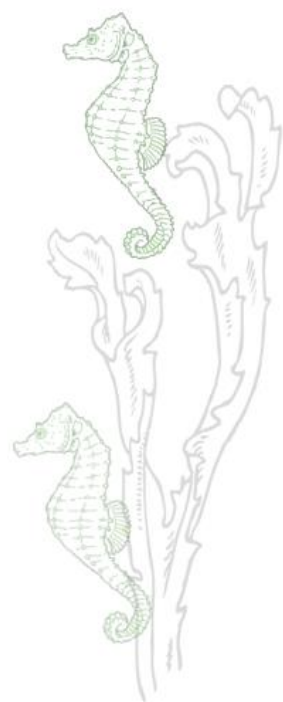
7. **Include trans content and representation in your routine.** Make sure when choosing movies, celebrities, and discussions there is an equal amount of trans representation. If you plan on having a movie night there are a number of trans focused movies to choose from, if you need any help just ask The Youth Project as they have a library of movies and can give you some great ideas. If you plan to have more than one movie night (once a month or once per semester) make sure to include trans focused movies in rotation. A gay/lesbian movie in January means a trans movie in February.
8. **Have copies of the Trans Inclusive Guidelines for students in Nova Scotia.** Read through it and have a good understanding of what students' rights are when it comes to gender identity and expression.

Always keep in mind that when you talk about gender, don't overstate it

Allow people to feel comfortable. If you sensationalize people who are transgender or questioning (and members of your GSA may be struggling with issues of gender identity) you may make them feel even more uncomfortable or confused. You want to create a safe place for your peers.

Bring in books, current events stories and articles about people who are transgender. Talk about them in your GSA.

Check and make sure that your GSAs outreach and publicity materials include information about trans issues.



Exploring Our Complex Identities

People are shaped by many different experiences due to the many aspects of their lives, whether it is race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, ability, age, class, or religion. If we only look at one of these factors, we are missing important parts of that person's identity. It is important to celebrate the diversity within your GSA and include everyone when you discuss queer and trans people and issues. It is also important to look at how homophobia, biphobia and transphobia interact with other oppressions, like racism, sexism, ableism, etc.

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

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

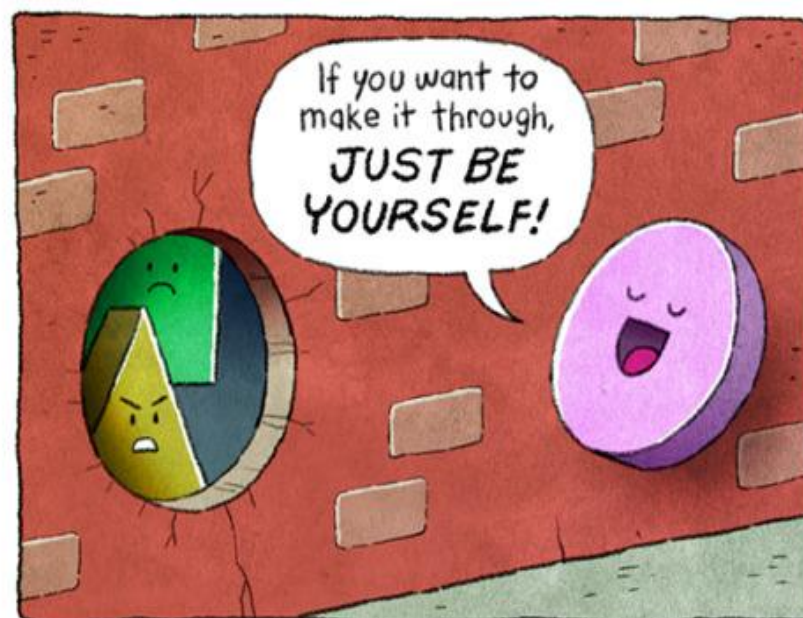
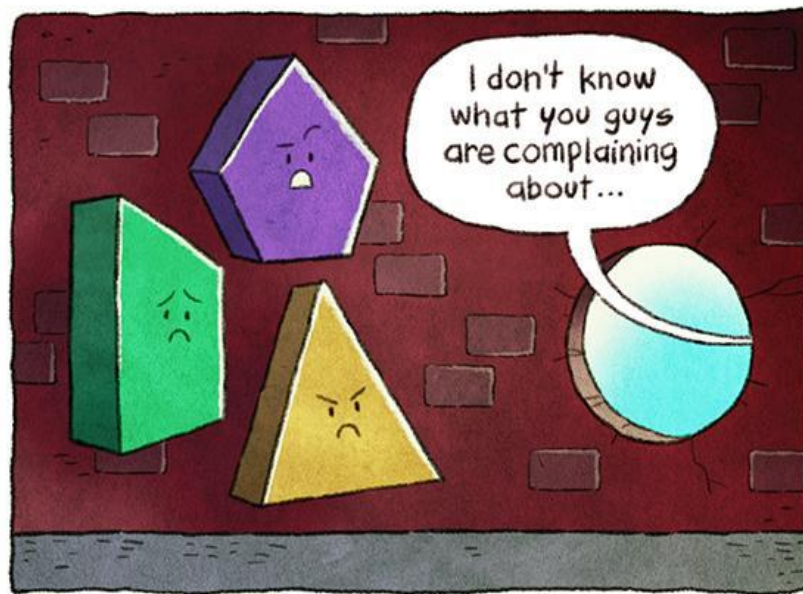
It's important to look at our combined experiences so we as GSA members can identify the roots of our struggles, and look at how these ideas connect. Queer, black author Audre Lorde has said "There is no such thing as a single issue struggle, because we do not live single issue lives". We aren't just our sexuality, or our gender identity, or our race or religion. We all live complex lives, and should not have to hide parts of ourselves away. We should be appreciated for our whole selves.

When we face multiple sources of struggle in the world, these are known as **intersecting oppressions** (or intersectionality: see the next page for a visual representation!). **Oppression** is when a person is mistreated or exploited by others with power, and results in stereotypes, myths and stigma about a group or a population (think of all the myths about LGBTQ people you may have heard growing up. It happens to other communities too). It is important that we look at how each of these identities intersect and make sure we are representing the whole person.

What happens if we don't experience oppression? Then we probably have **privilege**. Privilege is when a person has an unearned benefit or advantage. We do not exist in the world as

purely privileged, or purely oppressed. But we may experience more privileges when we belong to groups who don't experience racism (being white), sexism (being male), or ableism (not living with a disability).

Having privilege is not something we have to feel bad about, but we do need to talk about it! Imagine if someone heterosexual never acknowledged all the homophobia going on in the world: that would be upsetting! It's happening, and LGBTQ+ people can hear, feel and see it. We know because it is happening to us. We all have a role in fighting homophobia. It is the same with other issues of oppression too. We have to acknowledge inequality, and use our privilege to help fight oppression.



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INTERSECTIONALITY

a fun guide



this is Bob.



Bob is a stripey blue triangle.
AND SHOULD BE PROUD.



SADLY SOME PEOPLE DO NOT LIKE BOB. BOB
FACES OPPRESSION FOR BEING A TRIANGLE, &
FOR HAVING STRIPES.



LUCKILY, THERE ARE LIBERATION GROUPS!
BUT THEY AREN'T INTERSECTIONAL.

SO THEY
LOOK LIKE
THIS

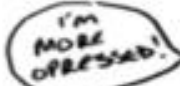


THEY DON'T TALK TO EACH OTHER.
IN FACT, THEY COMPETE.

BOB CAN'T WORK
OUT WHERE TO
GO.



AM I MORE
STRIPE OR
TRIANGLE?



BOB WISHES THAT THE
TRIANGLES AND STRIPES
COULD WORK TOGETHER.

OPPRESSION
OF ONE AFFECTS
US ALL!



NO LIBERATION
WITHOUT EQUAL
REPRESENTATION!

INTERSECTIONALITY IS
THE BELIEF THAT
OPPRESSIONS ARE
INTERLINKED AND
CANNOT BE SOLVED
ALONE.

OPPRESSIONS ARE NOT ISOLATED.
INTERSECTIONALITY NOW!

Want to look at our complex lives together? Take a look at this Flower of Power exercise to discuss our differences, similarities, and the ways we live with both oppression and privilege:

The best way to understand different aspects of people's identities is to get to know the complexity of your own identity.

The Power Flower Activity

by Wenh-In Ng based on Doris Marshall Institute

What It Is

The "Power Flower" is a tool developed by Canadian social change educators when working with groups to "identify who we are (and who we aren't) as individuals and as a group in relation to those who wield power in our society." (Educating for a Change, p. 87) The centre of a daisy-type flower is divided into 16 segments, each representing one facet or category of our social identity. This centre is surrounded by a double set of petals, one outer, one inner. The outer petals describe the dominant or powerful identities in society and the inner petals are the less dominant identities in society. Each member of the group is to colour in the petal that best reflects their identity. The object of the exercise is to discover each person's identity in relation to the dominant identities of their current society. The more colour on the outer (dominant) petals, the more social power that person possesses. Often one or more centre segments are left blank for the group to identify aspects or categories of social identity that carry special power significance peculiar to their context. For instance, in anti-racism work, whether a person is born in Canada or outside Canada would likely make a difference.

How the Exercise Works

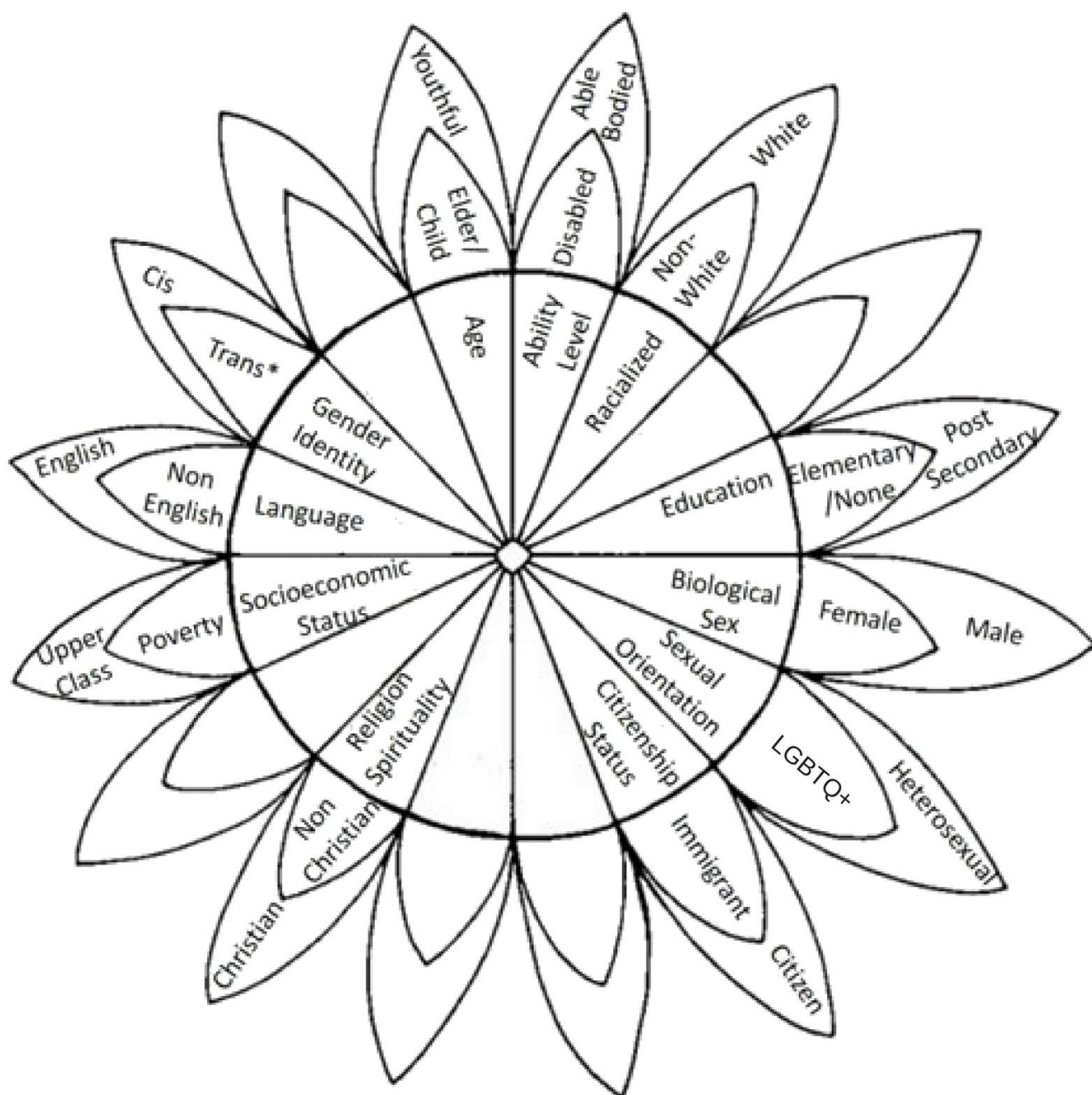
When planning to do this exercise, you need to duplicate enough copies of the flower for the whole group. Make a large replica of the diagram on a sheet of flipchart or the white board and tape it on the wall or flipchart. Then follow these steps:

Step 1 Introduce the purpose and rationale of the power flower, referring to the flower on newsprint.

Step 2 Working as a group, fill in the blank spaces in the flower to whatever your group can come up with.

Step 3 Working individually or in pairs, have participants locate themselves in each petal and colour that petal in on their own sheet. Count up the number of coloured petals on the outside and on the inside. Let each pair compare their results with that of their neighbours, making observations as they go along.

Step 4 In the large group, ask people to come forward and use different colours to colour in pieces of each petal to correspond to their own sheet. This makes up the composite, communal social identity of your group.



Reflecting on the Results

Personal social identity: Count how many of your petals are different from the dominant outer petals, which means you do not share those areas of power conferred by society. What light does this throw on the way you have been treated as a person of privilege or as a marginalized person? Which of these cannot be changed (for example, where you were born), and which ones could be changed (e.g. level of education)?

Group social identity: What does the composite picture tell you about who you are as a group? Are you fairly privileged? In what ways are you not privileged? How might this affect, for example, the way you might go about anti-racism work? If your GSA is located in a community that has changed quite substantially in recent years, what kind of power flower pattern might your “neighbours” present, and how much would it differ from your group flower? What implications would this pose to your GSA’s outreach work?

Interpersonal relations within your group: Notice who has fewer outside petals and thus less social power, and who has more. How can you turn this knowledge to advantage as the group works together? As you make decisions? For instance, you might as a group decide to take measures to make sure members with less power do get a chance to be heard. How do you as leader/facilitator compare with your group members? What does this reveal about possible tensions? Reflect on the unequal weight given some of the categories, for example, race or social-economic class, and thus the need to adjust the “power quotient” wielded by some petals over others.

What to Expect

As this exercise reveals aspects of our social identity that we are often not aware of, sometimes the unveiling can cause pain, anger, or even denial. A person who feels personally powerless is confronted by the fact that regardless of how she might feel, she is seen as wielding quite a bit of power by society in general. On the other hand, someone who feels personally responsible for not having succeeded may be freed from self-blame when they see that there are structural reasons holding them back. Helping one another untangle the personal from the structural can help us move forward with anti-racism and LGBTQ+ work and with our struggle to seek justice against other oppressions *11*

FAQs for LGBTQ Youth in Nova Scotia

Nova Scotia Human Rights Act Amendment

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

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

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

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Guidelines

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

The Nova Scotia Education Curriculum.

Students in Nova Scotia are supposed to learn about gender identity, sexual orientation, and about homophobia at different grade levels. You can find these topics in the NS Education Outcomes, at <https://sapps.ednet.ns.ca/Cart/>. As a GSA, find out if these outcomes are being met in your school!

Troubleshooting

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

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

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

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

Problem: We can’t find a staff advisor!

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

Problem: Our posters keep getting ripped down

Having an area in a display case for your GSA to advertise and show its presence is a great idea. Not only can you have your GSA meeting time and room but you can showcase some of the great things your GSA is doing. It is also important to be persistent. If your posters are being torn down keep putting them up! Ask the administration to make announcements about leaving school posters on the walls. Don’t get discouraged!

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

All schools in Nova Scotia must support interested students in the development of a GSA according to the department of education’s Guidelines for supporting Transgender and Gender-

nonconforming Students. If you are facing this kind of barrier, reach out to us here at The Youth Project. We can help you strategize.

Problem: Our meetings are being crashed.

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

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

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

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

A speaker list is a great way to make sure everyone is getting their voice heard. The facilitator, either your advisor or GSA leader, will make a list of each person who wants to speak and write their name down on a list. Once your name is called you have the floor with no interruptions until you are finished.

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

Starting your GSA with community standards can set the rules each student feels is needed for the group, make sure to revisit these periodically throughout the year. Educating the GSA members on what language is not tolerated and what can be considered transphobic is also a good place to start. It is important to understand not everyone comes to GSA with the same knowledge and understanding. Once everyone is educated and the rules are set make it clear that homophobia, transphobia, or bullying of any kind will not be tolerated in GSA. There are also resources and videos you can explore together on understanding transphobia (check out the GSA Manual page on our website!).

Problem: Our teacher advisor is too overbearing.

A great place to start is allowing your advisor to read the section “For Advisors” so they can get a feel for what is expected of them. Sharing resources like the GSA Advisor Handbook is also a great way to give them more knowledge on how to be a better advisor.

Suggest ways to share leadership of the GSA, like students creating an agenda and running a meeting, or bringing forth a project you want to work on. Step forward and ask to take on more leadership tasks.

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

Many great GSAs work with a council instead of a leader. This way more members can have a say in final decisions and everything is put to a vote.

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

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

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

One way around this is to set up a system of decision making. For example: There must be a majority (2/3 of the people present) in order for a motion to pass.

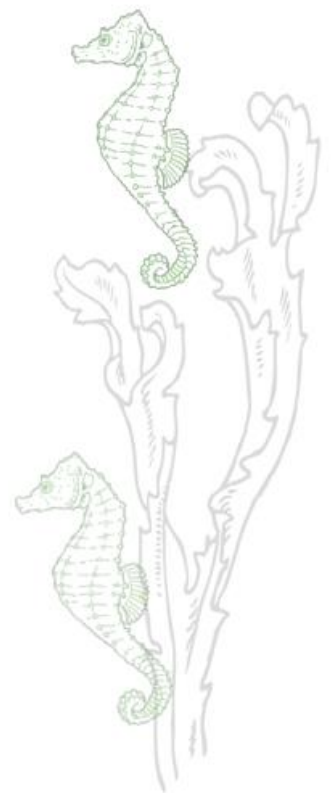
Possible decision making models include:

- Unanimous - A process called consensus is used to make sure everyone at the meeting agrees on the decision. This involves discussion when there is a dissenting opinion.
- Majority or 2/3 vote - This model usually works best when only club members present at the meeting are given a vote. You may want to publicize the meeting agenda beforehand so people will know what is being discussed (and will be more likely to show up if they feel strongly about the issue and want to be involved in the decision-making process).
- Club officers have ultimate decision-making power. This model may include further levels of decision-making power, such as Leaders--> President/Advisor-->Administration. This can give power to a small amount of people and lead to being undemocratic, so choose this model carefully and make sure your leaders will represent the GSA’s best interests.

More Resources & Ideas

Looking for more ideas, games, icebreakers, activities or what other GSAs have done? Fear not! The GSA Manual will have a web space where we will upload new ideas, activities and more. You can also contribute what your group has done throughout the year, so other GSAs can learn from your ideas.

www.youthproject.ns.ca



Glossary

Here's a quick reference for some of the most commonly used terms in the LGBTQ* community. Remember that people defy labels and not everyone will fit into a definition, label or box, no matter how large we make it. (An Action Kit from Transgender Youth) (Being an Ally to LGBT Students) (Its pronounced metrosexual)

Ally: Typically any non-LGBT person who supports and stands up for the rights of LGBT people. LGBT people can be allies to each other as well, such as a lesbian who is an ally to a transgender person.

Androgynous: Having the characteristics or nature of both maleness and femaleness; neither specifically feminine nor masculine. Often used to describe a person's gender expression.

Asexual: having a lack of (or low level of) sexual attraction to others and/or a lack of interest or desire for sex or sexual partners. Asexuality exists on a spectrum from people who experience no sexual attraction or have any desire for sex to those who experience low levels and only after significant amounts of time. Many of these different places on the spectrum have their own identity labels. Another term used within the asexual community is "ace," meaning someone who is asexual.

Biological sex, sex: a term used historically and within the medical field to refer to the chromosomal, hormonal and anatomical characteristics that are used to classify an individual as female or male.

Biphobia: a range of negative attitudes (e.g., fear, anger, intolerance, resentment, erasure, or discomfort) that one may have/express towards bisexual individuals. Biphobia can come from and be seen within the queer community as well as straight society.

Bisexual: a person emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to male/men and females/women. Other individuals may use this to indicate an attraction to individuals who identify outside of the gender binary as well and may use bisexual as a way to indicate an interest in more than one gender or sex (i.e. men and genderqueer people). This attraction does not have to be equally split or the same level of interest in the genders/sexes a person is attracted to. A bisexual person may lean more towards a certain population or experience fluidity over time, and these experiences are valid.

Cisgender – a person whose gender identity and biological sex assigned at birth align (e.g., man and male-assigned). Cis is Latin for “on the same side”.

Coming Out: Declaring one’s identity, specifically, being lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender, whether to a person in private or a group of people. To be “in the closet” means to hide one’s identity. For most LGBTQ people this is a life-long process, sharing this information with others over time.

Drag King / Drag Queen: a performer who wears the clothing typically associated with another gender, often involving the presentation of exaggerated, stereotypical gender characteristics. The performance of gender by drag queens (males in drag) or drag kings (females in drag) may be art, entertainment and/or parody.

Gay: A sexual orientation and/or identity of a person who is sexually and emotionally attracted to some members of the same sex. Although gay can refer to both males and females, many prefer the term “lesbian” for females. Gay is sometimes used as an umbrella term to refer to all lesbian, gay and bisexual people, but some prefer the more inclusive term “LGBT.”

Gender binary: the concept that everyone must be one of two genders: male or female.

Gender expression: The outward manifestation of masculinity and femininity, through clothing, hairstyle, mannerisms and other characteristics.

Gender identity: the inner sense of being a man, a woman, both or neither. Common identity labels include man, woman, genderqueer, trans, and more.

Gender dysphoria: an intense, persistent discomfort resulting from the awareness that the sex assigned at birth and the resulting gender expectations are not correct.

Gender Non-Conforming – someone whose gender presentation, whether by nature or by choice, does not align in a predicted fashion with gender-based expectations.

Genderqueer – a gender identity label often used by people who do not identify with the binary of man/woman; or as an umbrella term for many gender non-conforming or non-binary identities (e.g., agender, bigender, genderfluid). Genderqueer people may think of themselves as one or more of the following, and they may define these terms differently:

- may combine aspects man and woman and other identities (bigender, pangender);
- not having a gender or identifying with a gender (genderless, agender);

- moving between genders (genderfluid);
- third gender or other-gendered; includes those who do not place a name to their gender having an overlap of, or blurred lines between, gender identity and sexual and romantic orientation.

Gender-Neutral Pronoun: A pronoun that does not associate a gender with the person being discussed. Some examples Gender-Neutral Pronouns are they, ze, fey, hir.

Heteronormativity –the assumption, in individuals or in institutions, that everyone is heterosexual, and that heterosexuality is superior to all other sexualities. Leads to invisibility and stigmatizing of other sexualities. Often included in this concept is a level of gender normativity and gender roles, the assumption that individuals should identify as men and women, and be masculine men and feminine women, and finally that men and women are a complimentary pair.

Heterosexism: behavior that grants preferential treatment to heterosexual people, reinforces the idea that heterosexuality is somehow better or more “right” than queerness, or makes other sexualities invisible. The assumption that heterosexuality is the norm, and expected of others.

Heterosexual: A sexual orientation and/or identity of a person who is sexually and emotionally attracted to some members of the opposite sex. Often referred to as “straight.”

Homophobia: A range of negative attitudes and feelings toward homosexuality or people who are identified or perceived as being lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT). It can be expressed as antipathy, contempt, prejudice, aversion, or hatred, may be based on irrational fear, and is sometimes related to religious beliefs.

Homosexual: a [medical] term used to describe a person primarily emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to members of the same sex/gender. This term is considered stigmatizing due to its history as a category of mental illness, and is discouraged for common use (use gay or lesbian instead).

Hormone therapy: administration of hormones and hormonal agents to develop characteristics of a different gender or to block the development of unwanted gender characteristics. Hormone therapy is part of many but not all transitions.

Intersex: A general term used for a variety of conditions in which a person is born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn't fit the typical definitions of female or male. This could involve someone's physical body, hormones or chromosomes, or more than one of these. Intersex births are quite common, with around 1 in 1500-2000 people born intersex.

Lesbian: A sexual orientation and/or identity of a person who is female-identified and who is primarily attracted to other females.

LGBT: An umbrella term referring collectively to people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender. Sometimes the acronym is written as LGBTQ, with the “Q” referring to those who identify as questioning and/or queer. In the past “gay” was used as a general, over-arching term, but currently the more inclusive terms LGBT and LGBTQ are regularly used and preferred by many LGBT people and allies.

Pansexual: A person who experiences sexual, romantic, physical, and/or spiritual attraction for members of all gender identities/expressions.

Queer: 1) An umbrella term sometimes used by LGBTQA people to refer to the entire LGBT community. 2) An alternative that some people use to "queer" the idea of the labels and categories such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, etc. Similar to the concept of genderqueer. It is important to note that the word queer is an in-group term, and a word that can be considered offensive to some people, depending on their generation, geographic location, and relationship with the word.

Questioning: For some, the process of exploring and discovering one's own sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression

Sexual Orientation: The type of sexual, romantic, and/or physical attraction someone feels toward others. Often labeled based on the gender identity/expression of the person and who they are attracted to. Common labels: lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, etc.

Sex reassignment surgery (SRS): A term used by some medical professionals to refer to a group of surgical options that alter a person's biological sex. “Gender confirmation surgery” is considered by many to be a more affirming term. Many transgender people will not undergo SRS for health or financial reasons, or because it is not necessary for them.

Transgender or trans: This term has many definitions. It is frequently used as an umbrella term to refer to all people who do not identify with their assigned gender at birth or the binary gender system. This includes transsexuals, cross-dressers, genderqueer, drag kings, drag queens, two-spirit people, and others. Some transgender people feel they exist not within one of the two standard gender categories, but rather somewhere between, beyond, or outside of those two genders.

A person may also use transgender to identify the experiences of their gender identity not aligning (or ‘matching up’) with their assigned sex at birth.

Transition: The process of aligning your physical appearance to that of your gender identity. These may include social, legal and/or medical processes. Each step in this process is different for every person and none of them are mandatory. Transitioning is a complex process that occurs over a long period of time, it is not a one-time event.

Transphobia: The fear or hatred of transgender people or gender non-conforming behavior. Like biphobia, transphobia can also exist among lesbian, gay, and bisexual people as well as among heterosexual people.

Two-Spirit (also Two Spirit or Twospirit): A modern umbrella term used by some Indigenous communities to describe gender-variant individuals. A two-spirited person may have a cultural and/or spiritual role that represents more than one gender, or multiple genders. Someone two-spirit people may also identify with labels in the LGBTQ community, but Two-Spirit is a term that refers only to Indigenous peoples. It is also a way of reclaiming pre-colonial identities and traditions that were harmed during colonization.



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