# Starting Your GSA

If you've been looking for a queer community, a way to make new friends, or a group of people who are interested in getting involved in advocacy, joining or starting a GSA is a great place to start! **The 2021 National School Climate Survey** found that students in schools with a GSA are significantly less likely to hear anti-LGBTQ+ remarks in their schools, more likely to report feelings of safety, and more likely to feel a sense of belonging and support in their school.

## Find a Group of Interested Students

Getting a new organization off the ground can be a lot of work, and while it's certainly possible to start a GSA by yourself, the process will be a lot easier (and probably more fun) if you do it with a group of people. If you already have a group of friends who want to be involved — great! If not, there are a lot of different strategies you can use to recruit people. Check out the section below on recruitment for some ideas.

## Follow Your School's Guidelines for Starting a Club

Most schools will have a process in place for starting a new student organization. You may need to have a constitution, a faculty advisor, a statement of purpose, and/or other elements. You should be able to find these guidelines on your school's Clubs and Organizations page. If you're having trouble finding them, you can ask another student at your school who has founded a club, any club's faculty advisor, or a member of your school's administration. If you attend a public school in the United States that allows other non-curricular clubs, the administration must allow you to start a GSA as long as you follow all stated rules for student organizations. If you are facing undue resistance from your school, **take a look at this resource** to learn more about your rights as an LGBTQ+ student.

## Find a Faculty Advisor

Your faculty advisor should be a supportive staff member at your school who is willing to advocate for your club and for LGBTQ+ inclusion more generally. To determine who might be a good advisor, think about which faculty members have already shown themselves to be allies to LGBTQ+ students. Is there someone with a **Safe Space sign**, a pride flag, or another visible display of support in their classroom? Do you have librarians who are really great about asking for pronouns or teachers who always LGBTQ+ issues in their curriculum? These individuals might be great candidates to be your GSA advisor. If you have a supportive faculty member who is interested in being an advisor but would like some more information or training refer them to our **GSA Advisor Resource**. They may also be interested in connecting with their local **GLSEN Chapter**.

## Recruit (Potential) Members

Invite peers who are interested in building an affirming LGBTQ+ space. Check with existing clubs for students who might have an interest. Social media is a great way to reach out to potential members! Also, if your school has a newsletter or school-wide announcements, you can ask for information about the GSA to be shared there. For more ideas, check out our **tips for finding new GSA members**.

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There are many ways to advertise; think about using a variety of outreach strategies. Use a combination of your school bulletin, announcements, social media, flyers or word-of-mouth. Use colorful visuals that include your club's purpose and information about when and where the club meets. Participate in **GLSEN's Days of Action** to increase visibility of your GSA and its purpose.

## Pick a Meeting Place

First, check to see if your school has any specific guidelines about where clubs can meet.

Working within these guidelines, consider the following when choosing your meeting location:

1. Will you have consistent access to this space? You want to pick somewhere you'll be able to meet on a regular basis so that you don't have to change meeting locations every week. You may also want to consider whether you'll have access to this space outside of regular meeting times, in case you need to access club materials or use the room to work on club-related projects.
2. Does the space offer privacy? Some of your members may not be out to everyone, so it's important to have a space where members can feel safe participating in GSA. You may not want to meet in the cafeteria, for example, because members may not feel safe with other students walking by.
3. Is the space the right size for your group? For many clubs, a classroom can be a great meeting space. However, if your club has 100 members, for example, you may want to consider meeting in a larger space, such as a lecture hall or conference room.

## Pick a Meeting Time

You want to pick a time that a majority of interested members will be able to attend. Send out a **When2Meet** or a **Doodle poll** to potential members at the beginning of each year or each semester to see what meeting times work best for folks. If your school allows it, try to have meetings during the school day (like during lunch), so that members can avoid having to explain to potentially unsupportive parents why they are staying before or after school. If you need to have meetings outside of school hours, think about what times would be most practical for students. If a lot of folks rely on buses for transportation to and from school, consider whether morning or afternoon meetings would be best, based on whether your school offers early and/or late buses.

## Plan and Host Your First Meeting

Create an agenda so everyone knows the purpose and planned topics for the meeting. There are tons of things you can do, including discussions, inviting speakers, holding workshops, playing games, offering food or snacks, and more! Check out the **GLSEN calendar** for a list of awareness days, days of action, and other events for meeting topic ideas.

You may want to start with a discussion about why people feel the group is needed or important. This may also be a good time to decide on a leadership structure and recurring meeting schedule for your club. Members can work together to brainstorm projects for the club to do this year and topics to discuss at the meetings. **Check out our resource on running an effective meeting** for more tips.

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## Establish Community Agreements

Creating ground rules helps to ensure that group discussions are safe, confidential, and respectful. Community agreements, such as "What is said here, stays here," help maintain confidentiality. For suggestions, check out our **Community Agreements for Clubs resource**.

## Write a Mission Statement

The purpose of a mission statement is to identify why the club exists, spell out the goals and philosophy of the group, and explain the club's work. Creating a mission statement for your group will give you direction and purpose throughout the year and will inform others of what your group is about.

**Here are some questions to consider when writing your mission statement**

- Who are we? Who can be part of our group? Is it LGBTQ+-only? Youth-only?
- What are our values? What do we stand for? What are the key elements of our group's philosophy?
  - Examples include: Safety, Respect, Liberation, Joy, Service, Education, etc.
- What do we do? What are our goals? What does our group want to achieve in the short, medium and long term?
  - Examples include: raise awareness of anti-LGBTQ+ harassment in our school and in society, provide a safe and supportive place for LGBTQ+ students and allies, build intersectional solidarity among students, etc.
- How do we do it? How are we going to achieve our goals?
  - Examples include: promoting or passing anti-discrimination school policies, advocating for the removal of police on campus, working with teachers to develop lesson plans on LGBTQ+ history, organizing a coalition of allies in the school community, holding fundraisers to purchase LGBTQ+-inclusive library materials, and holding weekly meetings where students can find support.

**5 Tips for Writing an Effective Mission Statement**

1. Brainstorm your club's values. What do members care about? Why do they want to be part of this group? What do they care about? You can invite members to brainstorm values on post-it notes or a Google Doc, and then see what comes up most often. From there, you can choose a set of about 5 values that will shape the mission of your club. If it's helpful, you can use this list of over 200 sample values as a starting point.
2. Examine other mission statements to get ideas for your own. There are a few sample mission statements at the bottom of this document, but if you need more ideas, you can Google "GSA mission statements" for more ideas. It may also be helpful to look at mission statements from other clubs at your school.
3. Invite input from club members. Depending on how large your club is, it may not be feasible to workshop a mission statement with every single member of the club. However, you can ask folks to submit potential mission statements via a Google Form, vote on the top three, and combine ideas from them to make a statement that everyone is comfortable with.
4. Keep it concise. Your mission statement doesn't have to include every single thing your GSA plans to do; it should just be a set of principles that help guide the activities of your club. Two or three clear, focused sentences is a great length.
5. Share your mission statement widely. If your club has a website or social media account, include it there. You can also share it on club posters and at the beginning of meetings, to ensure everyone is on the same page about the purpose of your club.

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**Sample Mission Statement**

If you're having trouble coming up with a mission statement on your own, you can fill in the mission template below and edit it to suit your needs. You DO NOT have to follow this format, so if you want to add to or change the template, feel free to do so.

"The mission of the [School Name] [Club Name] is to [raise awareness of LGBTQ+ issues/support the LGBTQ+ community/advocate for the safety and inclusion of all students] through [list of three actions]."

For example:

"The mission of the Cedar Ridge High School Genders and Sexualities Alliance is to advocate for the safety and inclusion of all students through community-building, professional development, and grassroots organizing."

## Alternative GSAs

If you're unable to start a GSA in your school, consider starting a community or virtual GSA! By doing so, you'll have the ability to connect with more LGBTQ+ folks near you or even around the world! You can use many of the tips in this guide to start an alternative GSA, with the bonus of not having to navigate any barriers your school administration might present.

Things to Consider:

- Who do you want to be a member of your GSA? Is there a particular age range or geographic region you want to focus on?
- Who will lead your GSA? Is it entirely student-led? Is there an educator, parent, or member of a community organization involved?
- What will your GSA do? What kind of impact do you hope to have? Is it mostly social or activist? The answers to these questions may vary depending on whether your GSA is virtual or in-person.
- What meeting logistics do you need to consider? Will you have members in different time zones? What platform will you be meeting on? If you meet virtually, does the platform have captions? If you meet in person, is the meeting space accessible?

## Plan for the Future

Look at **GLSEN's calendar** to see a list of all of the LGBTQ+ related events for the school year. You can also look at your school's calendar to see if there are any on-campus events your GSA would want to be a part of. Then, develop an action plan and set goals to work for throughout the year. Look online to find opportunities to partner with other organizations near you, like a GLSEN chapter, GSA collaborative, or LGBTQ+ nonprofit.

For more information and to check out all of our GSA resources and programming, visit **www.glsen.org/gsa**. If you have questions or need support, send us an email at **students@glsen.org**. To learn more about glsen, head to **www.glsen.org**, or find us on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter @glsen.