



HOW TO START AN LGBTQ+ STUDENT AFFINITY GROUP

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Many thanks for providing an excellent GSA Advisor Handbook for us to use as a guide for the PPS How to Start an LGBTQ+ Affinity Group Handbook.

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All photos are stock photos from Canva.



Our Values

the PPS approach

Portland Public Schools works to provide the best environment for our LGBTQ2SIA+ students to learn, grow and succeed. When affirming teachers and staff are present for students, it provides the best opportunities for student success in and out of the classroom. Central to this role is a commitment to racial justice, gender justice, restorative justice and practices. The values that the LGBTQ2SIA+ Supports Team use to make this happen within PPS are authenticity, perseverance, teamwork, and compassion.

HOW TO START AN LGBTQ+ AFFINITY GROUP

Below you will find 8 steps to starting a GSA at your school. It covers everything from administrative directives and the GSA registration form to advertising meetings.

STEP 1: UNDERSTAND PPS GUIDANCE

Gender and Sexuality Alliance (GSA) clubs are to be treated like any other student club within Portland Public School and Oregon. There is an [Administrative Directive, 4.40.050-AD Student Clubs](#), that outlines how student clubs operate.

Having this information will help you as you seek out support from staff, teachers and administrators, and as you support students in creating this club.

STEP 2: IF STUDENT DRIVEN, FIND AN ADVISOR

School employees or volunteers can be an advisor for the GSA in your school. Union represented staff who serve in the role of advisor for an affinity group are entitled to additional pay for their time. Please speak with your union rep for more information.



STEP 3: IF STAFF DRIVEN, FIND INTERESTED STUDENTS

Finding LGBTQ2SIA+ students interested in a GSA can be helpful in getting others engaged in attending this new affinity group. Discussing the formation of the club with the school counselor/social worker could aid you in finding interested LGBTQ2SIA+ students. *While we love our allies, this space is just for students who are LGBTQ2SIA+.*

STEP 4: FILL OUT GSA REGISTRATION FORM

You can locate the GSA Registration Form on the [website](#) on the Gender and Sexuality Alliance tab. This form will have self-reflection questions for you to answer about why you want to be an advisor. It may take 30-60 minutes to fill out, so please give yourself (and your co-advisors if you will have help) enough time to do so.

STEP 5: PLAN YOUR MEETING AGENDA, PLACE & TIME

Choose a day of the week and time that doesn't overlap with many other clubs or sports. Then decide how frequently the GSA will meet - weekly, biweekly or monthly.

As long as a club meets during non-instructional time during the school day, parents, guardians, and family members do not have to opt-in or opt-out. Students get to decide how they spend their recess and lunch time. If the group meets at a time when students would have to miss class to attend or is before/after school, then students must get permission to attend.

STEP 6: ADVERTISE YOUR FIRST MEETING

Ask an adult (counselor, teacher, school secretary) or colleague how advertising for student groups works in your building. Common forms of advertisements include: flyers, posters, slideshows, loudspeaker announcements, or a combination of these things.



STEP 7: HAVE YOUR FIRST MEETING!

Great goals for your first meeting are to get to know each other, establish group agreements, and discuss what type of student groups the group wants to be. Determining your group's mission may assist with figuring this out if you feel stuck or uncertain. The three main types of groups are social, support, and activism. LGBTQ+ student groups can also be a combination of all three.

Social- a space for community and connection among peers.

Support- focuses on providing support to those that may be struggling with their sexual or gender identity and/or how they are treated by family, classmates and teachers.

Activism- focuses on educating students and staff and improving the culture within the school for LGBTQ2SIA+ students.

Finally decide where the digital club binder will be stored so that it can be kept to pass on to the next Advisor.

STEP 8: SECOND MEETING: STUDENTS' RIGHTS

For your second meeting, be sure that all LGBTQ2SIA+ students know their rights as students, [what Title IX](#) is, and how to make a Title IX report.

Their rights' include being able to change their name and gender marker with the school according to administrative directive, [4.30.061-AD Transgender, Nonbinary and Gender Diverse Students](#). Students also have a right to access the bathroom that aligns with their gender. Update students on the development of gender neutral bathrooms and locker rooms for your school.

IMPORTANT NOTE:

Your group's decision on what kind of LGBTQ+ student group they want to be and what they want to do may largely depend on where they fall in the K12 continuum. K-3 student groups may largely focus on how to be friends/[up-standers](#), how to handle big feelings (check out [OK You](#)), and how to make sure everyone feels welcomed in the space and in their building. Activities may include reading [books](#) that feature LGBTQ+ characters, making posters, advocating for restroom access, a pride parade, etc.

It is important, however, not to discount the strong desire of little ones to want to get involved when they see something unjust in their building, community, state, or our country. Be creative in finding ways for our youngest learners to flex their muscles for the greater good!

You are not alone! There are over 100 people in the advisor google group. Please use one another as a resource for finding/sharing new project ideas, to team up on cross district projects, etc.





YOUTH LED GSA

Student & Advisor Collaboration

The collaboration that happens between adults and students to grow and support GSAs is very important to their success.

Whether you are an Advisor, another staff member helping the GSA or a community member, your working relationship is part of what determines the success of your school's GSA.

TYPICAL TASKS OF GSA ADVISOR

The main role of a PPS GSA Advisor is to empower and support queer and trans students, especially students of color to be active leaders in their community. This includes:

- **Providing regular opportunities** for skill building, leadership and learning. Opportunities should be developmentally appropriate and plentiful.
- **Teaching students** how to navigate the ins and outs of your school system in terms of laws, policies, and guidance.
- **Training students to resolve conflict** among the group, group leadership, and/or between the group and the advisor(s).
- **Supporting students in fostering a safe environment** for all students to participate, including challenging any language and behavior from within the group that may perpetuate discrimination.
- **Assisting students** in managing club funds.
- **Educating and supporting students** around how to plan and execute programming, fundraisers, etc.
- **Set students up to succeed**, but allow for little failures that are followed by conversations that help students to reflect and learn.
- **Support changes within the group**, which may include shifting goals or the mission of the group.



SETTING YOURSELF UP FOR COLLABORATIVE SUCCESS

We all have hidden bias about age and that includes stereotypes about elders and youth. The following are questions to check-in with the assumptions and stereotypes that you might have about young people. When what we can or can't do is determined by our age, we are limiting ourselves and our society.



- Have I considered that attendance at school is required by law whether schools are effective or not?
- Are children and adolescents involved in deciding what they need to learn and how they learn?
- Are schools designed to empower students?
- Are students generally treated with respect and autonomy at school?
- Have you as an adult ever not been able to enter a store because there were more than two of you?
- How do I respond when students bring up ideas about taking action?
- Do you ever notice yourself discounting or underestimating the ability of young people?
- Do I think of student's friend groups as "cliques" or as social groups or youth subcultures?

Our hope is that by considering these and similar questions, you are able to tune-in to the power dynamics our youth must navigate. Asking questions is a great way to clarify comments by students and create an open communication style. Working to not make assumptions about a youth's experience or knowledge is a way to demonstrate your respect for students. Lastly, it is the Advisor's responsibility to create leadership opportunities for student's that want to practice leading. This can be facilitating, creating an agenda, organizing a specific action, or making fliers and distributing them.

Sustaining Your GSA

Now that you have started your school's GSA, you may be wondering how to keep students involved and what the day to day function of the GSA will look like. It's important to remember that the GSA should be student led as much as possible. Being able to find the best balance for you and the student leaders will likely happen in the first few months after student leaders have been elected or designated. In this section, we will review how to prepare for meetings, how to facilitate a meeting, and how to troubleshoot issues such as, lack of participation. Be sure to share this information with student leadership.

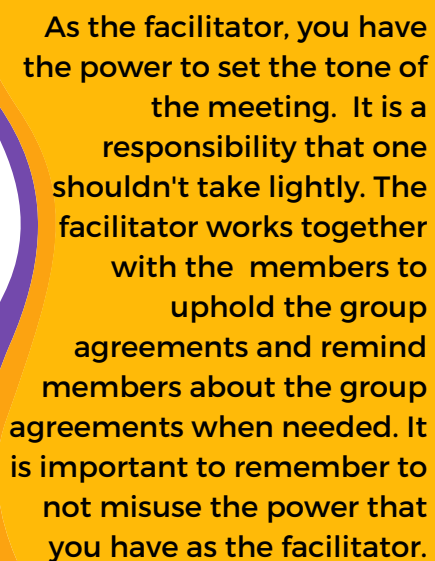


HOW TO PREPARE FOR MEETINGS

One of the most important ways to prepare for meetings is by making sure you get the word out about the meeting date, time and place. It is important to know how your building typically advertises/announces student group meetings. Some buildings allow for an announcement over the PA, others hang fliers in the halls, some send students around to classes to make the announcement. If your building doesn't have a set expectation, use this as an opportunity to engage student voice and choice.

Next, set the agenda for the meeting. Most groups meet at lunchtime which impacts how much time the group actually has to meet. Make sure to account for this when thinking about how you all want to structure your meetings. Here are some samples for [elementary, middle, and high school](#) meetings.

HOW TO FACILITATE A MEETING



As the facilitator, you have the power to set the tone of the meeting. It is a responsibility that one shouldn't take lightly. The facilitator works together with the members to uphold the group agreements and remind members about the group agreements when needed. It is important to remember to not misuse the power that you have as the facilitator.

A GSA meeting facilitator is a leader who runs the meeting and keeps the group on track with the agenda. While doing this, they encourage involvement and input from everyone in the group.

A crucial component for facilitating is to discuss and set the group agreements by which everyone agrees to conduct their behavior. Group agreements serve as common ground for GSA members to work together for the good of the group.

There are many ways you can go about setting group agreements. Looking up examples online of other groups such as [AWARE LA](#) is a good place to start. They have a lot of [resources](#) that center building an anti-racist environment. A good practice is to write them down and have them visible during meeting time. A best practice is to incorporate acknowledging them into your meeting structure.

This practice will serve as a reminder that everyone is responsible for the space, not just the advisor/facilitator. The whole group will sharpen their mindfulness and facilitation skills by tracking when they are off topic, noticing when someone isn't being included, and tracking the energy level of the group.

THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN PLANNING YOUR MEETING STRUCTURE

When you start thinking about the structure for facilitating a GSA meeting, it is important to discuss it collaboratively with the students who will be participating. Every group is going to be unique and each group needs to decide how their group will be facilitated.

Part of focusing on racial justice means that we don't automatically facilitate meetings that is the Eurocentric status quo. This means exploring different options that are available. You can start by reading this short article by Fast Company called [7 Tips For Making Your Meeting More Diverse, Inclusive and Equitable](#).

An inclusive meeting and/or teaching practice is The Progressive Stack. It works to neutralize implicit and explicit biases around whose voices are prioritized. The Progressive Stack is "a method of ensuring that voices that are often submerged, discounted, or excluded from traditional classroom discussions get a chance to be heard." The way that The Progressive Stack works in a discussion is that the most oppressed people speak first and then those with the next oppressed identities and so on. For example, Black trans student have the opportunity to speak first, then Black queer students, then East Asian queer students, any other people of color, white queer women, disabled white men, white gay male students and then white cis men last. You can read more about The Progressive Stack at [The Tattooed Prof website](#).



HOW TO TROUBLESHOOT ISSUES

This might be a good time to go back and reread the conflict resolution portion of this handbook. If it isn't necessarily conflict that you are dealing with, Advisors and students are welcome to reach out to the LGBTQ2SIA+ Program Supports staff to get more guidance on what might be going on within the meeting. Learning and growing through the challenges of running a student group can be the best parts and the group can grow stronger.



FAQ

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

This is the spot where your questions may get answered about all things GSA Advising related. If your question isn't answered here, please feel free to reach out to the LGBTQ2SIA+ Program Supports Manager.



Q: Do I/we need to fill out a form to start a GSA?

A: Yes. The google form can be found [here](#).

Q: What does GSA mean?

A: GSA is an abbreviation for a type of affinity group or club called Genders and Sexualities Alliance. There are other names for groups that serve the same function like Sexuality and Gender Alliance (SAGA) and Queer Student Alliance (QSA). Of course, your group can come up with a name and fun acronym that better encapsulates your personality, needs, and/or mission.

Q: What is an affinity group?

A: An affinity group is a designated safer space where everyone in the group shares a particular aspect of identity. Affinity groups can be groups based on race, ethnicity, physical or mental ability, language, class, religion, etc. Only people with the shared identity are able to join an affinity group. GSAs are an affinity group for students with non-dominant systemic sexual orientations and gender identities. So for GSAs, only students with non-dominant systemic sexual orientations and gender identities or students who are questioning can join. For more questions about affinity groups, read this FAQ from Children's Day School in San Francisco. We encourage schools to create a student group, in addition to their GSA, where allies and LGBTQ2SIA+ students can be in community together.

Q: What if the principal and/or vice principal aren't supportive of a GSA at my school?

A: There is an Administrative Directive, [4.40.050-AD Student Clubs](#), that outlines how student clubs operate. Contact the LGBTQ2SIA+ Program Manager to get support with starting your GSA.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: What do I say if a school employee discourages starting a GSA?

A: If you feel comfortable, you can start a conversation with them about the many reasons why such a space is necessary.

Forming/providing a GSA space is protected under the Federal Access Act. All GSA clubs must be treated just like every other school club on campus.

Q: Is a GSA a club that parents, guardians, or family members have to opt-in or opt-out of?

A: No. As long as a club meets during non-instructional time during the school day, parents, guardians, and family members do not have to opt-in or opt-out. Students get to decide how they spend their recess and lunch time. If the group meets at a time when students would have to miss class to attend or is before/after school, then students must get permission to attend.

Q: What can our GSA do as a club?

A: It depends on what your GSA members want the focus of your club to be. The three main types of GSAs are social, support, and activism. A social GSA is going to focus mainly on being a space for community and connection among peers. A support GSA is mainly focused on providing support to those that may be struggling with their sexual or gender identity. And an activism GSA is focused on educating students and staff, raising awareness and improving the culture within the school for LGBTQ2SIA+ students.



Q: What do we do if our advisor needs to change or if one of the student leaders steps down or graduates?

A: Great question! There is a GSA Advisor Change Form that needs to be filled out by the group. This ensures that the LGBTQ2SIA+ Program Manager is informed of any changes whether they are at the end of the year or any other point during the year.

Q: Our GSA has an exciting idea for an event, but we have questions about putting the plans into action. What do we do?

A: Awesome! We love supporting new ideas or programs. Have someone from your group reach out to the LGBTQ2SIA+ Program Manager to see how they can support you in putting your plans into action!

OPPORTUNITIES FOR NATIONAL YOUTH LEADERSHIP

Be sure to inform the student leaders in the GSA about these national opportunities for LGBTQ2SIA+ leadership!

GENDER JUSTICE LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

The [Gender Justice Leadership Programs](#) (GJLP) are youth-led programs for trans and gender nonconforming young people to build public understanding, empathy, and a movement for liberation through storytelling and media organizing.

[TRUTH](#) is a youth-led program for trans and gender- nonconforming young people to build public understanding, empathy, and a movement for liberation through storytelling and media organizing.



Illustration and descriptions from Gender Justice Leadership Program.

GLSEN NATIONAL STUDENT COUNCIL

The [National Student Council](#) is a GLSEN-sponsored youth leadership and engagement program. It is open to all youth currently enrolled in high school in the United States. Members of the National Student Council dedicate their time, passion, and commitment to the safer schools mission while also elevating the voices of marginalized groups within the LGBTQ community, including (but not limited to) youth of color, youth with different abilities, immigrant and undocumented youth, youth who are HIV positive, youth in rural communities, and transgender, non binary, intersex, and gender nonconforming youth.



Illustration and description from GLSEN.

SAMPLE STRUCTURE FOR ELEMENTARY

Welcoming:

Have dots/post-it notes available for students to mark which agreement they are going center during their time with the group today. *Notice with the group where folks are putting their attention for today's meeting and ask for one or two thoughts about the results of the week's poll.*

Agreements*

- **Respect:** Treat others the way **they** want to be treated. The rest of the Communication Guidelines are ways we practice Respect too.
- **Be Present:** In addition to logging on to Zoom, make sure you are mentally and emotionally here as well. Listen carefully. Turn on your video/camera if possible.
- **One Mic:** One person speaks at a time while others listen attentively.
- **Speak for Myself:** Use "I" statements and speak from your own experiences.
- **Make Space, Take Space:** Be aware of how much you speak. Make space for others to talk and take space if you don't always speak up.
- **Intent and Impact:** Remember that the impact of what you say can be different from what you intended. Also remember that the impact of what someone says may be different from that person's intentions. Clarify what is being said by asking questions and talking it out.
- **Try On:** Take a risk and try out things you haven't done before.
- **Don't Yuck My Yum:** You may disagree with someone, but don't hate on their opinions.
- **Honesty:** Be truthful in what you share. Be truthful with yourself.
- **Confidentiality:** The specific stories stay in this space. But we hope the lessons will leave. There are 3 exceptions to this agreement. We will break confidentiality if:
 - YOU ARE HURTING YOURSELF,
 - YOU ARE HURTING SOMEONE ELSE, OR
 - SOMEONE IS HURTING YOU

Check-in question:

Please share name, gender pronouns (GPs), and share what weather system best reflects where you are right now

[*California Conference for Equality and Justice's Agreements list](#)

Activity:

Be Your Own Best Friend

Prep: A few small pieces of paper,* and a pen or pencil.

Once students have finished writing on their slips, ask the group to share a little bit about **one** of their notes of encouragement. If the groups needs more time to finish their slips, or there isn't enough time for folks to share, come back to this activity during your next meeting.

*Plain white paper works perfectly fine, but you can also try fancier papers, or pictures cut from magazines (as long as there's space to write on them). This may be a two meeting activity

Closing:

Thank the group for their time and energy today and ask someone to lead the group affirmation cheer (a student will choose three affirmations from the list - your list of affirmations should grow as the year progresses - and say them one at a time, the group will repeat after them). Finish with "we are stronger together!" (or another group affirmation)

Affirmations:

I am a good friend	I shine bright	I am awesome
I am kind	I am loved	My words have power
I can do hard things	I am magical	I am honest
I am brave	I am smart	I listen to my body
I love myself	I am amazing	I am confident
I am a leader	I accept myself	I an a rockstar
I am strong	I am funny	I can learn new things

Student: I am magical!

Group: I am magical!

Student: I am funny!

Group: I am funny!

Student: I am brave!

Group: I am brave!

Everyone: We are stronger together!

SAMPLE STRUCTURE FOR MIDDLE/HIGH SCHOOL

Welcoming:

Have dots/post-it notes available for students to mark which agreement they are going center during their time with the group today. *Notice with the group where folks are putting their attention for today's meeting and ask for one or two thoughts about the results of the week's poll.*

Agreements*

- **Respect:** Treat others the way **they** want to be treated. The rest of the Communication Guidelines are ways we practice Respect too.
- **Be Present:** In addition to logging on to Zoom, make sure you are mentally and emotionally here as well. Listen carefully. Turn on your video/camera if possible.
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 - YOU ARE HURTING SOMEONE ELSE, OR
 - SOMEONE IS HURTING YOU

Check-in question:

Please share name, gender pronouns (GPs), and what weather system best reflects where you are right now.

[*California Conference for Equality and Justice's Agreements list](#)

Activity:[Make A Tiny Book](#)

Prep: paper, scissors, coloring/drawing implements

Students have decided to put together a "Know Your Rights" to hand out to the student body. Take a look at the video for quick instructions on how to make a tiny book then collaborate on content/design. This project may take a couple of meetings to complete, plan accordingly.

Closing:

Thank the group for their time and energy today and ask someone to lead the group affirmation cheer (a student will choose three affirmations from the list - your list of affirmations should grow as the year progresses - and say them one at a time, the group will repeat after them). Finish with "we are stronger together!" (or another group affirmation)

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I love myself	I am amazing	I am confident
I am a leader	I accept myself	I am a rockstar
I am strong	I am funny	I can learn new things

Student: I am magical!

Group: I am magical!

Student: I am funny!

Group: I am funny!

Student: I am brave!

Group: I am brave!

Everyone: We are stronger together!



Thank
You!

Portland Public Schools
LGBTQ2SIA+ Program Supports
How to Start a GSA Revised 2023

