



# Building an Inclusive GSA

Everyone moves through the world as an amalgamation of different identities. Our race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, native language, citizenship status, class, disability, and other factors all play a large role in shaping how we navigate the world. A GSA should be a place where everyone feels safe, welcome, included, affirmed, and empowered. In order for this to be the case, it is essential that you take intentional steps to craft an inclusive culture in your club. Building an inclusive club isn't something that can be accomplished in a day; it requires an ongoing commitment from all members and advisors.

Solidarity is voluntary, collective, sustained action based on an understanding that we don't all share the same risks, and we must work across all differences to ensure that every student has the right to a safe, supportive, and LGBTQ+-inclusive K-12 education. Solidarity involves bringing together different people based on finding common objectives and solutions. Solidarity work happens when you show up to support others experiencing harm and oppression by centering their experiences, leadership, decisions, needs, requests, and ideas. Centering intersectional solidarity in your GSA helps ensure that you can create a more just community in your school.

## Inclusive Club Norms

Every GSA should have a set of norms or by-laws that govern how students should interact with each other in the club. When you establish these norms, it's a good idea to have a conversation about solidarity with marginalized identities. As you're going through the process of establishing norms, make sure to discuss how each member hopes to have various aspects of their identities respected and affirmed.

The following questions are some considerations to keep in mind as you craft your club's norms:

- In what ways does your club hope to impact LGBTQ+ students? What concrete changes would you like to see in your school? What club norms would make these changes possible?
- How does your club plan to commit to racial justice? What steps do you need to take to ensure that members of all racial and ethnic backgrounds feel safe and included? What club norms are necessary to ensure ongoing anti-racist practices?
- How will you make your club inclusive of disabled students? What commitments to accessibility need to be made? How will you combat ableism? What club norms will ensure that all students have equal access to all club activities and programming?
- What happens when conflict arises? How will you commit to anti-carceral practices? How will you resolve conflict or harm without reinforcing institutional violence against marginalized students? What processes should you establish to handle difficult situations?

For more guidance on establishing norms and to view a list of sample norms, check out our [Space Agreements resource](#).

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## Inclusive Leadership

As you determine your GSA's leadership structure, you should ensure that there is a diversity of identities reflected in your club's leadership. If all of your club's leaders share the same identities, it is more likely that the experiences of other identity groups will be overlooked.

You can also consider having a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Chair — someone who is in charge of ensuring that the club's projects and overall culture are aligned with a commitment to inclusion. This person's responsibilities can vary, but could include providing approval on projects, suggesting diverse programming ideas, helping to handle identity-related conflicts, and more.

In your GSA, you should ensure that the experiences and needs of marginalized communities shape your GSA's work, while also ensuring that not all of the labor falls on the most marginalized students. This can look like having diverse programming, being intentional about listening to your club members and ensuring that everyone is comfortable and has their needs met, and avoiding sharing potentially traumatizing content without giving students the opportunity to opt out.

## Inclusive Programming

GSAs can have a variety of types of programming, from movie nights to school-wide protests and more. When you're deciding what kinds of activities to do in your GSA, you should ensure that your programming reflects the interests and experiences of students with diverse backgrounds.

As you plan out your year, make sure to be mindful about events and holidays that center various identities. For example, you may want to celebrate Black LGBTQ+ history for Black History Month, or bring in a guest speaker to talk about the disability justice movement in honor of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. You can check out the [GLSEN calendar](#) for a list of awareness days, and you can also keep an eye out for days that are specific to your school, city, or state, as well as other national observance days.

Collaborating with other identity-based clubs in your school is a great way to create intersectional events and programming. You may want to get in touch with the leaders or advisors of other clubs to see if there are good opportunities for a shared event or club meeting.

You may also want to get involved with community organizations or nonprofits that focus on supporting various identities in order to make an impact outside of your school. If you're interested in a specific topic or identity category, do a Google search to see what organizations and resources might be good possibilities for collaboration. You can also reach out to these organizations and ask if they would be willing to bring a guest speaker to your club to host a panel or presentation.

## Transformative Justice

Transformative Justice (TJ) is a political framework and approach for responding to violence, harm and abuse. At its most basic, it seeks to respond to violence without creating more violence and/or engaging in harm reduction to lessen the violence. TJ can be thought of as a way of "making things right," getting in "right relation," or creating justice together. Transformative justice responses and interventions 1) do not rely on the state (e.g. police, prisons, the criminal legal system, I.C.E., foster care system (though some TJ responses do rely on or incorporate social services like counseling); 2) do not reinforce or perpetuate violence such as oppressive norms or vigilantism; and most importantly, 3) actively cultivate the things we know prevent violence such as healing, accountability, resilience, and safety for all involved ([transformharm.org](https://transformharm.org)).

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Implementing transformative justice principles in your club can be a great way to navigate conflict without reinforcing the violence that many marginalized students face as a result of punitive practices in schools and carceral systems. Check out [this video by Shira Hassan, Martina Kartman, Rachel Herzing, Mia Mingus, Priya Rai, Lea Roth, and Sonya Shah](#) to learn more about transformative justice, and then have a group discussion about how you may want to use these principles in your club.

## Names, Pronouns, and Gender-Neutral Language

In your club meetings, have members introduce themselves with their names and pronouns. Students' pronouns may change throughout the year. Just like with other identities, many people develop their gender identity through different paths and at different rates. Be supportive of people wherever they are in their own process, and let them know there is no rush in defining or understanding their own personal gender identity. GSAs can be a great space for folks to experiment with different identities, pronouns, and names, so you may want to give space for students to introduce themselves at every meeting, instead of just at the beginning of the year, in case they want to explore different ways of expressing their identities.

When addressing a group of people, make sure to use gender-neutral language. For example, instead of saying "Welcome, ladies and gentlemen," say "Welcome, everyone." You should also use gender-neutral pronouns when referring to a group or when addressing someone whose pronouns you do not know.

Here is a list of some gender-neutral pronouns that people might use:

- They/Them/Theirs is the most common gender-neutral pronoun
  - When they went home after school, Ash poured themselves a glass of orange juice.
- Ze/Hir/Hirs is a common neopronoun
  - When ze went home after school, Ash poured himself a glass of orange juice.

### A note on neopronouns

Ze/Hir/Hirs is just one neopronoun, but there are many other neopronouns that people may use. If you are unsure how to use a set of pronouns, it is okay to ask. It may take some practice, but it is important to learn how to use someone's pronouns correctly in order to create a respectful and safe space for all students.

You can learn more about pronouns in the [GLSEN Pronoun Guide](#).

## Accessibility

There are some standard best practices for accessibility that you should observe in your club. However, access needs vary by individual, so it can be helpful to have something like an anonymous Google Form where members can let club leadership know about their specific needs and ensure that those are met.

Consider implementing the following suggestions to make your club more accessible:

- Wear face masks whenever possible. The COVID-19 pandemic isn't over, and many immunocompromised people are at higher risk of contracting the virus, and potentially facing significant long-term consequences. Wearing masks helps ensure that everyone is as safe as possible, and it lowers the risk of contracting other airborne illnesses as well.
- Offer a virtual way to attend meetings (such as a Zoom link) for folks who can't make it in person. Not only does this make meetings more accessible, it can also provide an opportunity for students who are unable to attend in person to be a part of the club.

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- Include information about accessibility on your posters, website, social media page, and/or meeting invitation. Offer an opportunity for folks to indicate their additional accessibility needs, and do your best to make sure those are met.
- Offer ASL interpreters or a live audio transcript for events that include sound. You don't need any fancy equipment to generate a transcript. For any attendees that need captions, they can utilize Zoom's live-captioning feature by starting a personal Zoom meeting, turning on their audio and turning on captions. This will create a personal transcript of the meeting for them on their own computer.
- For visually impaired students, make sure all documents and materials can be read out loud by screen reader software. If there are images, include alt text describing the images.
- Use fonts that are easy to read. Simple, sans serif fonts, like Arial, Calibri, Helvetica, or Comic Sans are generally good.
- Ensure that your meeting space is wheelchair accessible.
- Ensure that all ramps and elevators are functional, if applicable. If your meeting space requires attendees to take the stairs, consider a different location, and at least offer an option to join virtually.

To learn more about accessibility, check out our [disability justice resource](#).

## More Resources

### Racial Justice

[Community Safety: In the Streets and at Home](#)

[Intro to Immigration Justice](#)

[Undoing the Whitewashing of LGBTQ+ History](#)

[Here Black and Queer Panel Discussion](#)

[Erasure and Resilience: The Experiences of LGBTQ Students of Color, Black LGBTQ Youth in U.S. Schools](#)

[Erasure and Resilience: The Experiences of LGBTQ Students of Color, Asian American and Pacific Islander LGBTQ Youth in U.S. Schools](#)

[Erasure and Resilience: The Experiences of LGBTQ Students of Color, Latinx LGBTQ Youth in U.S. Schools](#)

[Erasure and Resilience: The Experiences of LGBTQ Students of Color, Native and Indigenous LGBTQ Youth in U.S. Schools](#)

### Disability Justice

[Intro to Disability Justice](#)

[List of national disability organizations and resources](#)

[Event and Presentation Accessibility Checklist](#)

[Web Accessibility Guidelines](#)

### Trans Inclusion

[Trans Action Kit](#)

[Improving School Climate for Transgender and Nonbinary Youth \(Research Brief\)](#)

[Transgender Youth in Schools Infographic](#)

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**Pronoun Guide**

**Gender Triangle**

**Separation and Stigma: Transgender Youth and School Facilities (Research Report)**

## **Conclusion**

Building an inclusive club is an ongoing process that requires commitment and action from everyone involved with the club. Hopefully, these steps have provided some guidance on steps you can take to create a GSA that includes, welcomes, and affirms all students regardless of their identities.

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