The GLSEN Jump-Start Guide

PART 2

Tips and Tools for **Organizing an Action Campaign**

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EDUCATION NETWORK

The GLSEN Jump-Start Guide

WELCOME!

Welcome to *The GLSEN Jump-Start Guide!* GLSEN's student organizing team has created this resource to support new and established Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) and similar groups that are working to make schools safer and more inclusive for all students. We've been hearing from many organizers that they need concrete ideas for building, shaping and activating their groups, and that's what this guide is all about. It takes you through the process of establishing your student club, identifying your mission and goals, assessing your school's climate, and engaging in projects and activities throughout the year. It also offers resources for further exploration.

This guide consists of eight self-contained sections; all are designed to help you *jump-start*—or bring fresh and creative energy to—your student club. Topics include:

- Building and Activating Your GSA
- Tips and Tools for Organizing an Action Campaign
- Strategies for Training Teachers
- Understanding Direct-Action Organizing
- Examining Power, Privilege and Oppression
- Creating Youth-Adult Partnerships
- Making Your Student Club Trans-Inclusive
- Evaluation, Continuation, Celebration!

Please note that we have chosen to use gender-neutral language in this resource. We recognize that replacing "he" and "she" with the gender-neutral "they" is grammatically questionable, but we hope you will overlook this in support of students who do not use "he" or "she" to identify themselves.

If you would like to receive more information about GLSEN, or to get involved in the safer schools movement, please register online at www.studentorganizing.org! We welcome your feedback on the activities in this guide—and we salute you for the important work you are doing to create safer schools for all regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression.

Tips and Tools for Organizing an Action Campaign

COntEnts

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Using Your Mission Statement and Climate Survey to Strategize

Your group and its allies have the power to bring about concrete change

Ready... In creating your mission statement, your group identified its purpose and priorities, which grew from your members' ideas on how to make your school safer and more inclusive. In conducting your School Climate Survey, your group obtained specific data that clarified your school community's views on LGBT people and issues. Now it's time to begin thinking about the ways in which your group can help bring about change more broadly in your school.

The activities in this section of *The GLSEN Jump-Start Guide* are meant to give you a taste of what is known as **Direct Action Organizing**. Organizers go through extensive training, and organizing theory can seem confusing because it requires a shift in the way many of us are taught to look at social-justice issues and relations of power between individuals and groups. If you'd like to learn more, look at Part 4 of *The GLSEN Jump-Start Guide*, "Understanding Direct Action Organizing"; visit the GLSEN website at www.glsen.org; or contact your local GLSEN chapter or the Jump-Start Student Organizer in your area. (We encourage you to do all of those anyway!)

Set... **People:** Entire group, working first in smaller groups of two or three, then as a whole

Tools: Large construction paper (lots), markers (lots), tape, copies of your mission statement (enough for everyone), copies of your survey results (enough for everyone)

Time: 40–60 minutes

Additional Resource: "Creating An Action Plan" in the Appendix

GO! **Small-Group Brainstorm: Choosing an Issue** (10–15 minutes)

The first part of this activity involves choosing an issue around which your group can organize concrete actions. As you think about possible issues to tackle, it's helpful to identify both a problem you'd like to address along with a solution to that problem—and then to formulate a sentence that describes the problem and solution.
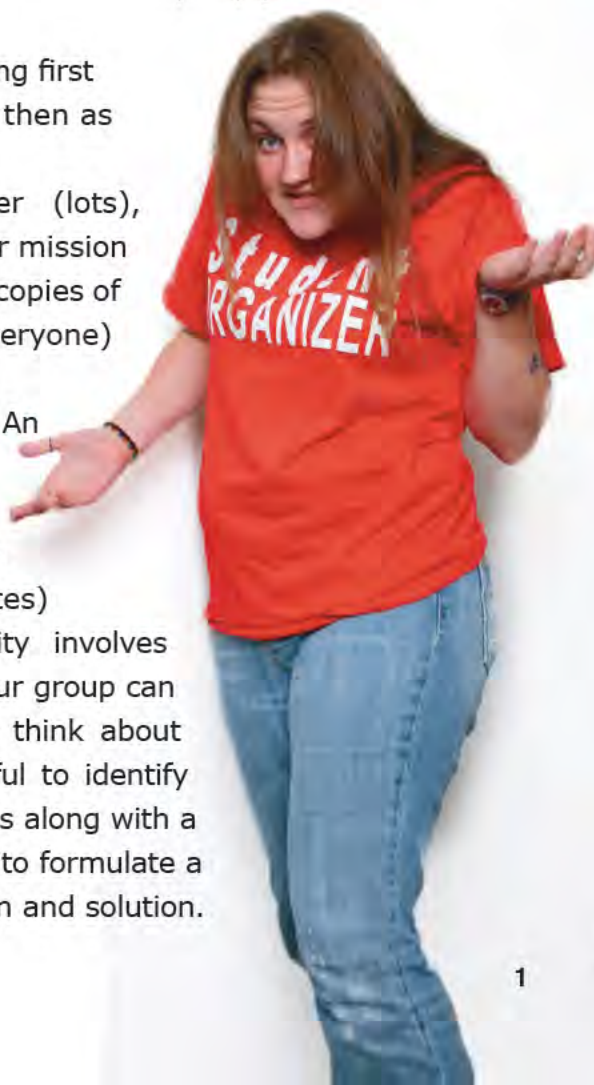
...Strategizing (continued)

✓ A Checklist for Activists

It may be that there are a couple pressing issues that need immediate attention. But if you have a larger pool of issues that seem equally worthwhile, consider the following ideals when narrowing them down to a short list. The issues your group chooses to focus on should:

1. Be winnable. The problem should not be so large or the solution so remote that your group gets overwhelmed. Your group's members should be able to see from the start that there is a good chance of winning, or at least that there is a good strategy for winning.

2. Be understandable. It is preferable that you don't have to convince people that the problem exists or that your solution is sensible. A good issue should not require a lengthy and difficult explanation. When people hear about this issue, they should want to help solve it.

3. Be non-divisive. Avoid issues that divide your allies and supporters. Don't pit friend against friend, teacher against student, race/ethnicity/class/religion against race/ethnicity/class/religion.

4. Result in a real improvement in people's lives. If you can see and feel the improvement after you have tackled your chosen issue, then you can be sure that it has actually been won.

5. Give people a sense of their own power. Your group and its allies should feel that the victory was won directly by them, and that they have the power to bring about change and to be taken seriously by the rest of your school community—especially those in authority.

Here's an example: "Mandatory staff training on how teachers can address name-calling would lead to safer classrooms for students."

Step 1: Begin by dividing into small groups of two or three people. Each group should get a piece of construction paper and a marker and enough copies of your mission statement and survey results for everyone. Each group should designate a recorder.

Step 2: Each small group's task is to: **a.) identify three problems** in your school, using your mission statement and survey results as starting points; **b.) discuss different ways** to address those problems; and **c.) develop three statements** that state those problems while at the same time proposing solutions to them. Take three to five minutes for each issue. The recorder should write your small group's three problem/solution statements on the construction paper.

Large-Group Discussion: Choosing an Issue (10–15 minutes)
Step 3: Reconvene as a whole group. Hang your problem/solution statements side by side where everyone can see them. Take a minute to read each group's list.

The task of the whole group is to select three issues around which you can organize. Depending on the size and resources of your group, you may need to work on one issue at a time once you begin organizing. If you can choose three now, however, you won't find yourself wondering "What next?" once you've finished working on the first issue.

...Strategizing (continued)

Step 4: Designate a recorder. The recorder should hang a blank sheet for the final list beside the other sheets. **Begin by identifying common issues and having the recorder mark them.** If all the groups identified a particular issue, clearly your GSA should tackle that issue right away!

Step 5: Once your group has decided on three issues, the recorder should write them on the blank sheet, leaving some space between them. **Identify your specific goals for each issue,** and have the recorder write the goals in the space near the corresponding issue.

Small-Group Brainstorm: Planning Tactics
(10–15 minutes)

Now that you have three issues your group plans to pursue, you should think about how you can begin to involve your school community in these issues.

Step 6: Divide into three groups, one for each of the issues you've selected. Everyone should choose the issue they'd like to focus on, and join that group. This doesn't have to mean that each person will work only on that issue; it simply means that each person has a priority issue.

Step 7: Each group should formulate at least three tactics, or strategies, for advancing its issue. (To do this, each group should get another piece of construction paper and a marker, and designate a recorder and reporter.) Continuing with the previous example, let's say the issue is: "Mandatory staff training on how teachers can address name-calling would lead to safer classrooms for students." What three tactics could you plan that would begin to generate interest around and responses to this issue? A great place to begin is by raising awareness, and for that you need some sort of publicity tactic. Could someone in your group interview a few students and teachers and submit the interview to the school paper? Or could your group produce a series of posters that depict appropriate responses to name-calling? A second tactic could be talking individually with teachers and administrators or setting up a meeting with a group of teacher allies.

...Strategizing (continued)

A third tactic could be researching LGBT advocacy groups in your community in order to find someone who would be available to lead a workshop at your school. (Don't forget your local GLSEN chapter! Visit www.glsen.org to learn more about GLSEN's network of local chapters.)

Step 8: Make sure that for each of your three tactics, your recorder writes down the names of people you need to contact, along with any contact information you have for them. The recorder should also make a note of any gaps in your information, and someone should volunteer to find that information for your next meeting.

Large-Group Discussion: Planning Tactics
(10–15 minutes)

Step 9: Reconvene again as a whole group. Hang your tactics lists side by side where everyone can see them. Each group's reporter should take a few minutes to explain their group's tactics, and obtain feedback and pertinent information from the other groups.

Step 10: Delegate responsibilities clearly and specifically so that everyone knows what they need to accomplish for your next meeting. This is especially important if any of your tactics involve work that can or needs to be done outside of your meeting time.

Step 11: Anticipate responses to your tactics and prepare for them. For example, if you plan to hang posters around your school, what will you do if they're vandalized or torn down? One idea is to hang another poster behind your main poster, with a message declaring that your group and its allies will not be silenced by intolerance and hate.

Creating a **Timeline**

Building a timeline based on **specific tasks** will enable your group to proceed in an **organized way**

Ready... In order to make your group's work more effective and manageable, it's important to establish goals, to develop strategies or **tactics** for meeting those goals, and to break down each tactic into specific **tasks** or actions. Being as concrete as possible will help you spend your time more productively and will keep everyone involved in the planning process. Once you've mapped out each specific task, building a timeline for your GSA's work will enable you to proceed in a thoughtful, organized way. It also will make assessing your work easier later on.

Set... **People:** Entire group, working individually and as a whole
Tools: Large sheets of paper (3–5), loose-leaf paper (1–2 sheets per person), markers, pens (1 per person), tape, index cards or Post-it notes (15–20 per person), copies of your previously brainstormed tactics from Activity 2.1
Time: 45–60 minutes

GO! **Individual and Group Brainstorm: Planning Tasks** (15–20 minutes)

The activity for developing a timeline requires you to start by brainstorming planning tasks. While a small group or even one person could do this, involving the entire group will produce a more thorough and effective timeline. This activity builds on Activity 2.1, which involved brainstorming tactics for your group.

Step 1: Distribute 15 to 20 index cards or Post-it notes to each person. One person should volunteer to write your chosen tactics (as discussed in Activity 2.1 and at your earlier meetings) on a large sheet of paper, leaving space between and around each one, and hang the tactics sheet in a visible spot. This way, everyone will be able to see the tactics in front of them as they're brainstorming the planning tasks.

Step 2: Everyone in the group should now divide the chosen tactics into the smallest tasks possible, going one tactic at a time. As each person thinks of a task, they should write it on an index card or Post-it note, keeping related cards or notes together.

Creating a **Timeline** (continued)

For example, before you distribute flyers in your school, you'll need to decide on your message, design the flyers, possibly have the flyers approved by your advisor and/or principal, and make copies for posting and distribution. Each of those tasks would be written on a separate card or note, and those four tasks would be posted together near the "Flyers" tactic on your tactics sheet. Another option is to split up the tactics and have one or two people individually brainstorm on just one tactic each.

Step 3: Finish this part of the activity by having everyone tape or stick their tasks on the tactics sheet, posting each task or group of tasks beside their corresponding tactic.

Large-Group Discussion: Prioritizing Tasks
(15–20 minutes)

Step 4: Now review each tactic and the tasks you've brainstormed for it. Decide as a group which tasks are necessary and doable given your time, finances and people power. If there is disagreement about which tasks should be given priority status, take a few minutes for everyone to select three top-priority tasks, and discuss their choices. Don't get bogged down in debating tasks. However, if you need to set aside some undecided tasks until later, when you will have a better sense of the bigger picture, then do so.

Large-Group Discussion: Arranging the Tasks into a Timeline
(15–20 minutes)

The next part of the activity is easier in the large group because it requires everyone's input about their individual commitments and schedules.

Step 5: Begin by moving the cards or notes into a chronological order—the sequence in which they would be done. It may be possible to have more than one task happening at any given time, so the tasks may not simply happen one after another but rather two or three at a time, followed by one task, followed by two more at the same time, and so on. For example, while someone in your group is designing a flyer, another person can be planning an agenda.

Creating a **Timeline** (continued)

Step 6: After ordering the tasks chronologically, the group should add dates to each task card or note. It may be helpful to start with the last task that needs to be done and work your way back. Take into consideration other school and community events and the personal schedules of the group members.

Step 7: You're almost finished! The final step in building the timeline entails deciding which person should be responsible for making sure that each task happens. If you decide to delegate to people outside the group, make one group member responsible for asking those people and reporting back to the group. Make sure that no one in the group takes on too many tasks, even if they feel pre-pared to complete them. Remember, providing a reality check on expectations and responsibilities is a huge part of supporting one another as a group.

Step 8: Finally, review the timeline and any undecided, undated or unassigned tasks. These may require that you gather additional information from sources outside the meeting or that you give them some extra thought. Your group can post your timeline in your meeting space or keep it in a secure spot and bring it to future meetings. Some-one should volunteer to type up the timeline, with dates and assign-ments, and bring copies for everyone in the group to your next meeting.

Framing Your Message

Your **message** should be an advertisement, a lesson, and a **call to action**

Ready... In order to create meaningful change in your school community, it is crucial to mobilize allies who can influence the **decision-maker**—the person who has the power to give you what you want. In high schools, the decision-maker is usually a principal, headmaster, superintendent or other administrator; parents, school board members and elected officials also play a role in making decisions that affect school policy. Remember that every decision-maker is accountable to someone else. "Someone else" can be an individual or group: it can be the constituents affected by the decision-maker's decisions, such as students, parents, teachers or voters, or it can be the person who supervises the decision-maker. Since all these groups have different interests and concerns, you should think carefully about how to present and explain your work to each specific audience. Choosing your words in order to make your work matter to each of these groups is known as "framing your message."

In framing your message, you not only want to make your group's name and activities recognizable to everyone in your community, but you also want to educate people and inspire them to join your group or become allies. Your message should be an advertisement, a lesson and a call to action. In this activity, you will work through a series of steps that are designed to help you frame your message clearly and effectively.

Set... **People:** Entire group, working first in small groups, then as a whole

Tools: Large paper, loose-leaf paper, markers, pens (5–10)

Time: 45–70 minutes

GO! **Identifying Your Audiences: People, Power and Pocketbook** (10–15 minutes)

Step 1: Begin by dividing into three small groups. Each group should take a piece of large paper and a marker, and designate a recorder.

Framing Your Message (continued)

Decision-makers can be swayed by **colleagues**, people in **authority**, and people with **financial influence**.

Who influences the decision-maker?

In order to frame your message so that it makes sense to each of your target audiences, you should begin by identifying those audiences and their concerns. The decision-maker can be influenced in three ways:

1. People—colleagues and community members with a personal relationship to the decision-maker. Examples: If the decision-maker is your school principal, "people" influence would include your principal's family members, students who are friendly with the principal, teachers and administrators at your school, or religious leaders at the principal's house of worship

2. Power—people with authority or supervision over the decision-maker. Examples: the district superintendent; a school board member; a trustee of a private school; a religious leader at a parochial school; a parent active in the PTA; or a local, state or federal elected official

3. Pocketbook—people with financial influence over the decision-maker. Examples: voters and taxpayers, families who pay tuition, school board members or superintendents who control budgets

Step 2: Each group should brainstorm a list of all the individuals and groups that fall into their category, leaving some space between each item. (Group 1 will be the "People" group, Group 2 the "Power" group, and Group 3 the "Pocketbook" group.) Include anyone you can think of, as long as they have some connection to the decision-maker. Remember, each entry on the brainstorm lists is a potential audience for your message!

To reach each audience in a way that gains support for your GSA, you need to identify their **self-interest** or goals. What is most important to each group? What would they be willing to support? **For example:** With **families**, school safety might be an important goal, so you may want to frame your message so that it emphasizes the fact that anti-LGBT bias produces an unsafe school environment. With **principals**, retention might be the most important issue, so you might want to frame your message by emphasizing that LGBT students are more likely to drop out when they feel unsafe. With **teachers**, you might want to frame your message by emphasizing that LGBT students' grades are more likely to drop if they feel unsafe.

Framing Your Message (continued)

Step 3: Groups 1, 2 and 3 should now take a few minutes to identify the self-interest of each of the individuals or groups they've listed on their brainstorm sheet. Write any ideas or details you think of in the space you left after each item on your list.

Choosing Your "Ask" (10–15 minutes)

Step 4: Remaining in your groups, now take some time to brainstorm your "asks"—that is, the specific action(s) you are asking each of your audiences to take. For each of the audiences listed on each brainstorm sheet, propose one or more actions that speak to that audience's self-interest.

For example: If the issue you have chosen to address is school safety and the decision-maker is a school board member, you can ask families to attend a school board meeting to request teacher training in anti-LGBT harassment intervention. If your issue is creating an LGBT-inclusive curriculum and the decision-maker is the district superintendent, you can ask students to write letters to the superintendent requesting that money be budgeted for LGBT resources. If your issue is ensuring that same-sex couples are comfortable attending school social events such as dances or the prom and the decision-maker is the principal, you can ask teachers to raise this issue during faculty meetings.

Framing Your Message (10–15 minutes)

Step 5: Still in your groups, brainstorm messages to correspond to the "asks." Each message should convince an audience to carry out the "ask" you've proposed for that particular audience. For example:

Family message: "Our survey shows that 8 out of 10 LGBT students don't feel safe at this school. Please show your concern for our safety by attending the school board meeting."

Student message: "None of the history textbooks we use mentions LGBT people. Please write a letter to (name the superintendent and provide contact information) in order to request funds for LGBT resources."

Teacher message: "Making all students feel welcome at social events, such as dances, will make our school a more equitable and inclusive place. Please show your support by encouraging the principal to issue a statement affirming our school's commitment to inclusion and equality."

Framing Your Message (continued)

Prioritizing Your Audiences (10–15 minutes)

Step 6: Come back together as a large group. Hang the brainstorm sheets side by side on the wall, and take a couple minutes for everyone to read them. Hang a blank sheet next to the brainstorm sheets.

Step 7: As a group, prioritize your audiences. Begin by thinking about the issue or issues your group considers most important. Let's say the issue is getting mandatory training for teachers so that they know how to intervene in cases of anti-LGBT harassment, and the decision-maker is the principal. In relating your audiences to your issue, there are two factors to consider:

, The audiences most directly affected by the problem your group seeks to solve; and

, The audiences with the most influence over the decision-maker

The people most affected by anti-LGBT harassment are the people getting harassed and the people who care about the people getting harassed. Therefore, according to the first factor, your priority audiences might be students, teachers, family members, school-based administrators and other members of the outside community who care about the victims of harassment.

Step 8: According to the "People, Power and Pocketbook" analysis, which of these priority audiences also has influence with the principal? Family members often do. Other school administrators often do. A student who has a personal relationship to the principal, a teacher who has been working with the principal for a long time, or a member of the outside community may have influence. Your group should choose three audiences that it wants to focus on, and write down those audiences on the blank sheet, leaving some space between each one.

Step 9: Next, think about your "asks." Let's say you've chosen families, teachers and alumni who live in the outside community. What are your "asks" for each of those audiences? For families, you could ask them to attend a meeting with the principal to discuss teacher training. For teachers, you could ask them to request training in their faculty meetings with the principal. For alumni, you could ask them to call the principal to express concern about student safety and show support for teacher training. Write down your three "asks" next to their corresponding audiences.

Framing Your Message (continued)

Step 10: Now it's time to think about how you can frame your messages. Brainstorm two messages for each ask. For example: for families, you could create a message saying, "Many teachers would like to learn how to stop harassment in their classrooms. Please show your concern for student safety by attending our meeting to discuss teacher training." Or, "Most harassment happens in the school hallways when teachers are present. Please support teacher training to end harassment in our school." Write each message down next to its corresponding "ask" and audience.
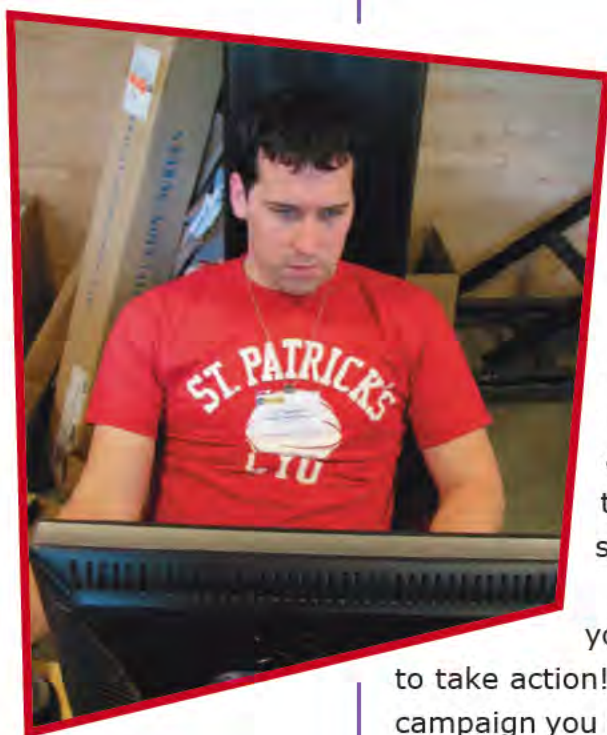
Creating Talking Points and Launching Your Campaign (5–10 minutes)

Step 11: Once your group has brainstormed its messages, take a few minutes to review them. Using these messages, you may wish to create a few more general "talking points" that your group can use to communicate its issue to all audiences and the media. The specialized messages you've framed can help to determine what other supporters and broader audiences need to hear in order to inform and activate them. Write the talking points on the sheet with your specialized messages.

Now that you have identified your issue, prioritized your audiences, and framed your message, you're ready to take action! As a group, discuss when and how you will launch the campaign you have just outlined. Use the timeline you created in Activity 2.2 to guide the steps you take in the implementation of your action campaign.

Creating an Action Plan

Getting Started: Establishing key short-term goals

The first step in putting together an action plan is to think carefully about your key short-term goals. In most groups, there is rarely a shortage of ideas about good things to do. It is easy to make a list of them; it is much harder to get even a few of them done with the time, money and people you have. Agreeing first on your desired outcomes will help you choose the best actions to take—and, just as importantly, focus your group's thinking on what worthy ideas must be left out and why.

For a new group's first action plan, three to five key goals (or priorities) are usually plenty. The important work of determining key goals should involve as many of your members as possible. It is good to begin this discussion within the first few meetings of your group, but it is usually best not to try to settle on a final list of key short-term goals until your membership has stabilized and people have settled into their schedules and commitments. Get the process started early, keep it moving, and if at all possible, try to conclude it by your seventh or eighth meeting.

Establishing action steps

The key goals lend themselves well to the formation of your first committees. Getting people involved at the committee level builds enthusiasm, puts people in places that match their interests and expertise, and gets things done. Some of the committees that form around your first short-term goals may evolve into **standing committees**, such as fundraising, policy and outreach committees; others will probably be **short-term committees** whose jobs will be done within a few months, after which they can dissolve. The plan that will be developed from the committees' input should include some basic information about each proposed action, including:

⇨ **What** should be done
⇨ **Who** should do it (who is principally responsible for doing it or seeing that it's done)
⇨ **Who** should help (the individuals or committees that should support the above persons in getting it done) and
⇨ **When** the action should be done (this can be expressed as a beginning date, a deadline or an interval of time)

Some action plans also address how much the action will cost and methods for evaluating its completion and/or success.

Creating an Action Plan (continued)

The committees should make certain that timelines and individual responsibilities are reasonable, keeping in mind that everyone has academic, personal and/or professional obligations. They should assign tasks to people only with group members' full understanding and consent. It is important to make sure that the actions in your plan will not be all-consuming tasks for any individual or group.

It is equally important for the committee to ask itself this question: **If all the proposed actions are completed on time, will the overall goal probably be achieved?** If the committee's proposed actions cannot be said to do this, they should be re-evaluated and revised until they can. If no set of actions the committee can come up with can reasonably be expected to produce the desired outcome, the committee should re-evaluate the goal itself. It should then recommend to the group a revised goal, along with an appropriate set of actions to support it.

Creating a budget

Your group's budget may be determined by your school's administration without your group's input, or it may be based on your group's needs from the previous year. Perhaps your group receives no money from your school at all and relies completely on fundraising. Whatever the case, most action plans require at least some money for supplies, printing, transportation, event logistics or other purposes. In order to give your plan a chance to succeed, you should develop a simple budget to support it. It is important to figure out how much money it will take to do the job right, as well as to spare you any personal expense. A budget will give you something concrete to show people when you approach them for contributions and will serve as a reality check during the planning process.

Putting your plan into action

If you have formed a plan along the lines recommended above, one of the most important secrets of success—**assigning clear responsibility for each and every task to a single person**—should have been addressed already. That person should be the one who takes personal responsibility for the task, even if other people are providing support. The next step is to **determine who will be the coordinator of the plan**. Someone needs to review the progress toward implementation of the plan as a whole on a regular basis.

Creating an Action Plan (continued)

Each of your group's meetings should include a brief update on plan implementation. If the group is falling behind in an area, it is good to mention that and discuss it. It is usually not a good idea, however, to become more specific, as individuals who for one reason or another may be behind on doing their part can become embarrassed or defensive.

People will sometimes fall behind. Count on it. When they do, it should be the job of someone (probably the committee chair) to check in and discuss the situation. Sometimes a simple reminder is all that is needed. At other times, it is important to determine if the goals were too ambitious; if the actions that were chosen have proven not to be the best ones to take to pursue the goals; if unforeseen circumstances have arisen that make certain actions difficult, impossible or no longer advisable; or if the people who took on particular responsibilities turn out not to be the best suited for the tasks. Adjustments can and should be made.

Remember: Your action plan is a road map, a set of guidelines and most of all a tool. Be as faithful to it as possible while respecting people's obligations, limitations and feelings. Stay focused on the goals, not just the actions, and remain flexible about how the goals can best be achieved. Maintain enough freedom to recognize and take advantage of new opportunities when they arise. If you follow these steps, your first action plan will put your new group on the road to success!

Adapted from a resource by Don Elder of the River Network