



OUTFRONT
MINNESOTA

Just Getting Started?

How to Make Your GSA Inclusive,
Effective, & Fun!





What is the Minnesota GSA Network?

The Minnesota Gender & Sexuality Alliance (GSA) Network connects LGBTQ+ middle & high school groups around the state & provides youth and advisors with support, education, relationship building, & leadership development opportunities. **Turn this page over to learn more about our values, priorities, and involvement opportunities.**

Why join?

You & your peers will get access to resources, trainings, guest speakers, & fun events. Most importantly, it's an opportunity to build youth power for justice & equity in your schools & communities.

Is it Youth-Led?

Yes! Here are three ways students are leaders in this network:

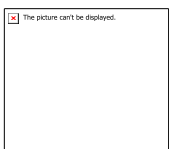
- **GSA Network Leadership Council members** meet twice a month to set goals, gather resources, & plan events for the network. The Leadership Council operates on an 11 month cycle with meetings that run each year from June - April and is made up of 15-20 students from different high schools around the state.
- **Student Leads** represent their individual GSA's to the broader network. Each school in the network has two Student Leads who receive regular communication with ideas, resources, and tools for GSA organizing. They connect regularly with other Student Leads & Leadership Council members in person & online.
- **Students with ideas, questions, or concerns** are encouraged to share them any time. Contact the Youth and Schools Program at youth@outfront.org.

What if my group isn't called a "GSA"?

That's ok! In the past GSA has often stood for "Gay Straight Alliance" but in the context of this network, we're pushing for GSA to stand for **Gender & Sexuality Alliance**, to be clear that everyone is welcome no matter how you identify on the spectrum of gender and sexual orientation. Your LGBTQ+ group is welcome in this network regardless of what your group's name is.

How to get connected?

A student or advisor can register your group with the network at www.outfront.org/mngsa . If you're a student, you can join the **MN GSA Network Facebook Group**. See reverse side for more info.



Values

This purpose of this network is to build the capacity of LGBTQ+ students to create schools & communities where all youth can thrive. **We recognize that gender and sexuality intersect with race, ethnicity, class, ability, age, culture, and all social systems.** We seek to build the relationships and the power necessary to work against all forms of oppression and create a more just world. In this context, our core values are:

- ❑ **Youth Leadership** – Because youth should make decisions and have ownership in the programs and systems that are meant to serve and support them, we prioritize youth leadership and decision-making at all levels.
- ❑ **Racial Justice** – Because white privilege and structural racism negatively impact the safety, dignity, and quality of life for people of color every day in America, we prioritize racial justice through leadership opportunities for youth and educators of color (especially LGBTQ+ individuals). We also work to end policies and practices that disproportionately harm youth of color, and we incorporate content about white privilege, anti-racism, and allyship into trainings and events at all levels.
- ❑ **Trans Justice** – Because transgender and gender diverse youth experience higher rates of discrimination, violence, hostility, and rejection in their schools, homes, and communities, we prioritize the support and leadership development of trans youth, and emphasize the needs, concerns, and issues impacting the transgender community in our trainings and events.
- ❑ **Support & Sustainability** - Because we envision a program that supports and connects youth and educators statewide, we prioritize a capacity-building approach, collaboration and accountability among partners, technical assistance for educators, and financial investment to ensure the long-term success of this program.

How can adults get involved?

Adults who value youth voice and youth leadership can get involved as...

- ❑ **Guest Speakers**
 - ❖ We're in the process of building a speakers bureau for the MN GSA Network. If you would like to develop your own presentation on a related topic, experience, or skill, please contact youth@outfront.org
- ❑ **Volunteers** - Do you want to help out at events like Q-Quest, the Youth Summit & more? Sign up!
- ❑ **Donors** - Become a sustaining member of OutFront or make a one-time donation to help cover the cost of materials, food, and other necessities for our youth program. www.outfront.org/donate



First GSA Meeting Sample Agenda

Introductions

- Go around and invite everyone to share their name, grade, pronouns (if they're comfortable doing so. For more on this see Pronouns FAQ at the end of this packet) and a getting to know you question
 - favorite food, color, movie, celebrity, holiday (and/or)
 - what was the highlight of your summer? your weekend, your day? etc

Ground Rules / Group Agreements

“What are some guidelines that we can all agree on to make sure our GSA is respectful, inclusive, & supportive?”

Brainstorm ideas together as a group. Below are some common GSA agreements that tend to work well:

- Confidentiality - what's said here stays here
- Respect people's identities, chosen names, and pronouns
- Respect the coming out process
 - No one should feel pressured to come out as LGBTQ+
 - But if someone *does* come out to the GSA, support them & celebrate with them!
 - Even after someone comes out within the GSA, let them speak for themselves outside the group and make their own decisions about who else they come out to and when
- Move Up, Move Back
 - If you don't usually talk much in group settings, challenge yourself to step up and share what you're thinking
 - If you tend to talk a lot in groups, challenge yourself to step back and make space for other voices to be heard
- “One Diva/Rockstar, One Mic”
 - one person speaks at a time
 - listen to each other without interrupting
- Intentions vs. Impact
 - Assume that everyone comes into the group with the best of intentions

- Be aware that your words or actions might impact someone in a way that's different from what you intended
- If you hurt someone or don't live up to one of these agreements, acknowledge it and ask what you can do to make things right
- Follow through on what you say you'll do
- Advocate for yourself. Tell the group what you need
- Keep an open mind to multiple perspectives and experiences

Discussion

- Why do you think it's important to have a GSA?
- What kinds of things would you like to do in GSA?
- Do you want to be primarily for socializing, support, education, activism - or a combination?

You could use the **GSA Interest Survey** on the next page and use it to see what people want to get out of their GSA experience.

Write a Mission Statement

This is optional, but can help clarify a group's purpose and help your GSA develop an identity.

This packet includes some sample mission statements.

Leadership Structure

- Do you want people to have specific roles like president, secretary etc?
 - You don't need to have those roles defined, but it can help
- How will it be decided what you do at each meeting?

This packet includes info about various GSA leadership structures.

Close the Meeting

- Do a go-round and ask everyone how they felt about the meeting
 - What did they like?
 - What would they change?
- Make sure everyone knows the time, place, and what to expect at the next meeting

The Minnesota School Pride GSA Network is supported by OutFront Minnesota

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GSA Interest Survey

Read the following items and CHECK the FIVE that you would be most interested in doing.

- Talk about challenges you're dealing with at home or school
- Discuss LGBTQ-related current events and how they relate to your lives
- Organize a campaign to get a gender neutral bathroom in your school
- Plan parties and social gatherings for members of your GSA
- Start a petition to make sex ed more LGBTQ-inclusive at your school
- Learn about LGBTQ history
- Participate in the "Day of Silence" to draw attention to the silencing effect of anti-LGBTQ bullying
- Set up an info table in the cafeteria on Transgender Day of Remembrance
- Watch movies with LGBTQ characters or themes as a GSA
- Get together with GSA students from other schools for a field trip or social activity
- Other _____

Which of the following **TWO statements** best describe your reasons for wanting to be part of your GSA?

- I want to meet other LGBTQ students and allies, get to know people, make new friends, and socialize.
- I want the opportunity to talk about issues impacting my life and get support when I'm struggling.
- I want to learn about LGBTQ issues and spread awareness about LGBTQ issues among students and teachers at my school.
- I want to make changes to policies and procedures at my school to make it a better place for LGBTQ students.



Sample GSA Mission Statements

Some schools require clubs to write a mission statement describing their purpose. GSAs (Gender & Sexuality Alliances or Gay Straight Alliances). Students join GSAs for a variety of reasons including the chance to make new friends, learn about LGBTQ issues, get support, and make a positive impact on their school. So before you write a mission statement, your GSA should discuss what type of group you want to be. Some GSAs choose to focus on one of the areas listed below. Others are a combination of all three. Here are some examples to get you started.

Activist

The “Bayard Rustin GSA” brings together students of all sexual orientations and gender identities to promote equity for LGBTQ students. We educate ourselves and our peers about the connections between homophobia, transphobia, and other kinds of oppression, and we strive to create a school and a community where our identities and experiences are validated. By developing our leadership skills and acting on our values, we believe we can make a positive impact on our school community.

Education

The “Live and Learn GSA” welcomes all students who want to learn about gender and sexual orientation. We discuss LGBTQ identities, history, and current events. We raise awareness about LGBTQ+ issues and teach ourselves and our school community about what it means to be an ally through discussions, film showings, guest speakers, and other educational events.

Social/Support

The “Rainbow Connection GSA” is a safe space for students of all sexual orientations and gender identities to meet new people, share stories, eat food, and have fun. Members come together to talk about personal issues and get feedback, encouragement, and support in a relaxed, confidential environment.

Combination

The “Best of All Worlds GSA” exists to make our school safe, supportive, and empowering for students of all sexual orientations and gender identities. We provide LGBTQ+ students and allies with opportunities to connect, learn, support each other, and have fun. We educate students and staff about LGBTQ+ issues and take action to make our school climate more inclusive, affirming, and equitable for everyone.



Choosing a GSA Leadership Model

How will you organize your GSA?

What will be expected of club leaders and who will they report to?

First, you should check to see if your school's policies require a certain type of leadership or structure. Below are some leadership models that you could choose from, combine, or adapt to fit your GSA.

Each of these leadership styles has specific roles within it. To provide clarity and maximize effectiveness, your GSA can write a brief description of each role outlining the responsibilities involved. In most cases, students are elected for roles by the group's members. **Below are some examples of leadership structures your GSA could use.** If you try one of these leadership structures for awhile and it doesn't work well, you can always switch to another one or modify the approach to fit your GSA.

Executive

This leadership style has elected positions like President (or Co-Presidents), Vice President, Treasurer, Secretary etc. The President & Vice President meet outside of the regular GSA meeting time to plan the agenda for the following meeting. This format can be useful for getting things done because it designates a clear chain of responsibility.

Board-Based

In this style of leadership, the club elects board members who each have a leadership role that covers one area of responsibility. Examples include Facilitator/Chair, Outreach Coordinator, Event Coordinator, Fundraising Coordinator, Representatives for each grade etc. Roles are well-defined, but board members make decisions collectively and report to the group as a whole instead of to a President or Co-President. Board members can also meet ahead of time to plan the agenda for future meetings.

[Over]

Committees

Within this structure, committees are formed to address specific GSA goals or needs. Some examples include Education Committee, Social Committee, or committees related to specific topics or events like LGBTQ History Month Committee, Day of Silence Committee etc. In the context of larger GSAs, committees sometimes get together outside of the regular meeting time and have a representative report back during a larger GSA meeting.

Rotating Roles

Group members take turns facilitating meetings, taking notes, bringing a topic to discuss etc. People volunteer for what they want to do at the next meeting. This style gives the group lots of flexibility and allows students to try different things, but it can make it harder to plan ahead and hold people accountable for what they say they'll do.

Suggestions for Transitioning Leadership Smoothly

- Set up a mentoring system where future leaders work with current leaders to develop skills they'll need alongside someone who can give feedback and advice
- Transfer leadership during the school year. Some GSAs transfer leadership at the end of the first semester. That way, newer leaders can be assisted by older leaders
- Plan a social event for the beginning of the year or over the summer so members can build relationships between older and younger students and build momentum for the future
- Have current leaders keep clear and organized notes, files, and reflections that they can pass on to new leaders

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This document was developed by OutFront staff using resources from GSA Network www.gsanetwork.org



How to Facilitate a Meeting

What Does a Facilitator Do?

The facilitator is the person or people who take responsibility for running a meeting. Their duties include:

● Coming up with the agenda

- What should happen in this meeting? Develop a list of topics that will be discussed
- Estimate how much time each section will take & prioritize what's most important
- Get agreement from the group on the the agenda as the meeting begins

● Creating a welcoming, respectful environment

- Remind the group of any agreed-upon ground rules
- Pay attention to the vibe in the room - ask how people are doing
- Make sure that everyone has an opportunity to participate and that no one dominates

● Making the meeting smooth and effective

- Clearly state the purpose or desired outcome for each section of the agenda
 - Include any background info or context that people need to know
- Help people re-focus if the group gets off track
- Guide discussion - listen, ask questions, and suggest ways to approach parts of the agenda
- Decide when it's time to move on
 - Summarize what you're hearing and check in with the group beforehand
 - Identify next steps or follow up that's needed
- **If the group makes a decision** about something, make sure everyone knows
 - **which people** agreed to do **what**, by **when**?
- Intervening when problems come up, dealing with concerns

Frequently Asked Questions - - - >

Does every meeting need a facilitator?

It depends on what you're trying to accomplish. If you're a group of friends just hanging out together, then no. But if you have any shared goals or sense of purpose for your time together, then it's very helpful to have a facilitator! It could be the same person every time or you could rotate. You can also have co-facilitators as long as it's clear who's responsible for which parts of the meeting.

Is the facilitator the boss of everyone?

No. It's not the facilitator's job to make all the decisions - it's to help the meeting be positive and productive. The facilitator can provide input, but should prioritize listening and creating space for everyone to participate equally. A good facilitator does their best to ensure people will leave the meeting feeling that their time, ideas, & perspectives were valued.

Some suggested wording for when...

Certain people are talking a lot & others aren't saying anything

"Ok, we've heard a lot from some people, but I want to make sure everyone has a chance to weigh in. Is there anybody who hasn't spoken yet who has something to add?" *[Check in with specific people]*

Someone brings up an issue that's way off topic

"I think we've gotten a little off-track so let's bring it back to _____" *(whatever the topic is right now).*

If what they're bringing up is relevant, just not right now, you can always say...

"I hear you, but let's finish discussing _____ and talk about that later in the meeting if we have time"

Everyone's talking at the same time

"Let's have one conversation at a time please"

"Remember, we agreed to listen & not interrupt each other so let's listen to _____ who has the floor"

Remember that as the facilitator, you're in charge. It's ok to cut someone off or ask people to raise their hands & have you call on them. If this is frequently an issue with your group, you could use some sort of talking piece (object you pass around; whoever has it can talk & everyone else has to listen)

Discussion feels like it's going in circles

"Ok, so far I've heard _____ *(summarize what's been said so far)*. "Does anyone have something to add besides what's been said already?"

(or)

"Reasons to move forward with this idea are _____, and some arguments I've heard against it are _____. "I've also heard people propose the following solution _____ *(or propose a solution yourself)*. "So should we make a decision now or put this on hold and come back to it another time?"

People aren't sure, or disagree about what to do

"So it seems like most people agree that _____, but there's some different points of view about _____. So let's see if we can come to an agreement about these last few issues." *(call on people to restate their views if necessary)*. OR

"We're almost out of time, so are people ok with staying another 10 minutes to keep talking about this, or should we postpone a decision until our next meeting?"

****Sometimes it's better to put a decision on hold, especially if:*

- the group needs critical information
- the group needs to hear from others who aren't present
- the group isn't prepared

A decision has been made

"Alright so does everyone agree that as a group we're going to _____?"

"And that means that the following people will _____ by _____?" *(repeat back who has agreed to what, & by when...don't move on until specific roles have been filled & it's clear who's responsible for what)*

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Pronouns

FAQ

What are pronouns?

Pronouns are everywhere! They're the words we use to refer to people in place of their names.

For example: *My friend Joe leaves **his** stuff everywhere! Last night **he** left his backpack at my house so today, I need to give it back to **him**.*

Example 2: *My cousin Dylan told me about **their** favorite book. I asked **them** if I could borrow it, and **they** said yes.*

Other examples of pronouns include

she / her / hers

they / them / theirs or

[one of many other options](#)

Why do pronouns matter?

It's easy to make assumptions about people & what they want to be called, but it's important to let folks speak for themselves about who they are and how they identify. Asking for & using someone's correct pronouns is a way to be considerate and respectful. Imagine what it would feel like if someone consistently used the wrong pronouns when talking to you or about you...It would feel pretty uncomfortable and upsetting right? That's why getting pronouns right matters. One of the most basic ways to be an ally to transgender, non-binary, and gender nonconforming people is to pay attention to pronouns and ask people which ones they use. It's important to know that some people use pronouns that may be new to you, and some people don't like pronouns at all and would rather you just use their name.

What does nonbinary mean?

Nonbinary or genderqueer is an umbrella term that can refer to anyone whose gender identity falls somewhere between or outside the categories of male and female. People who identify this way might use gender neutral pronouns like they/them, ze/hir, or [something from this list](#)

But doesn't THEY mean more than one person?

Not always! "They" can be a singular pronoun. [Just ask the Washington Post](#). Even though it may take some getting used to, it's not only grammatically correct, it could [change the world!](#)

What if I don't know what someone's pronouns are?

Just ask! Or, when you're introducing yourself, share your own pronouns and ask "what pronouns do you use?" after the person shares their name. One way to make your GSA more inclusive is to ask everyone to share the pronouns they use as part of your regular intro activities.

For example: *My name is Brittany and I use she, her, and hers.*

Can I just say "I use feminine pronouns?" or "I use male pronouns?" It's quicker.

It's better to name the specific words you want people to use when referring to you. Words like *feminine* and *masculine* mean different things to different people and are more closely related to gender expression (the way people dress, how they carry themselves etc). For example, someone might use the pronouns *she* and *her* but not identify with the word *feminine*. And saying "male pronouns" implies that if one is "male," everybody knows which pronouns they use, but that might not be the case.

What if I call someone by the wrong pronoun?

Mess-ups happen and that's ok! Nobody's perfect, and most folks will understand as long as they know you're trying. The important thing is to apologize, move on, and try to get it right next time. And remember that - just like with sexual orientation - a person's gender identity can be a very personal and private thing. A person may identify with one gender, but still use a pronoun commonly associated with another gender if they're not out as trans or it's how they feel most comfortable. So even if you know that someone is questioning their gender identity or might be out to a few people as trans, it's still a best practice to ask someone which specific pronouns they'd like you to use rather than make assumptions.

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