

# 3RD EDITION GSA GUIDEBOOK

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NEED-TO-KNOW SERIES



## GSA Genesis: A Rookie's Companion

Use this chapter to lay a roadmap for your brand new GSA!

### Contents:

- **Equal Access Act**
- **Advisor 101**
- **Crafting a Mission and Constitution**
- **Establishing Leadership**

# Equal Access Act

of 1984



**A law that states that any non-curricular club should have equal access for students within schools.**

Under the Federal Equal Access Act, any school that receives government funding and has at least one other non-curricular club must also allow a GSA. As the law states, “It shall be unlawful for any public secondary school which receives Federal financial assistance...to deny equal access or a fair opportunity to, or discriminate against, any students who wish to conduct a meeting ...on the basis of the religious, political, philosophical, or other content of the speech at such meetings.”

The law also says that your school must treat all clubs the same and let them use school resources in the same way. If your school allows other clubs to meet in classrooms, put up posters and organize school events, then they have to allow your GSA to do the same. The act also stipulates that meetings must be voluntary, initiated by the students, and of no specified numerical size. School employees, such as faculty advisers, may attend and help facilitate.

# Recruiting a Great Advisor

One major support for a GSA group is an engaged faculty advisor. They serve as a role model and an ally to the group. We outline some advisor responsibilities on page ##.

A great way to align your group with an advisor is through an interview process. Although this may *sound* overly formal, it doesn't have to be. A friendly interview is a great way to emphasize the commitment of taking on an advisor role, outline the group's expectations, and start building a working relationship.

Start by identifying interested faculty members and setting up a time for your group to meet with them. **Even if there is only one candidate, this is still a worthwhile process.** You might find it more manageable for a few leadership officers of the group to conduct the interviews and share a recording/written record for the rest of the group to access.



## Pro tip!

Provide any interested faculty with a document including: your group's mission statement, a brief group description & history, and an outline of the advisor role!

## Here are some interview questions to get you started:

1. Can you share your name (and pronouns?) and tell us a bit about yourself?
2. Why are you interested in advising our GSA group? (Listen for knowledge of LGBTQ culture!)
3. If you were chosen as our GSA advisor, what is one goal you would have? (Listen for responses that prioritize **your voice as a student!**)
4. Our group recognizes that most faculty members have a variety of time commitments outside of teaching, how will you ensure that advising our GSA group remains a priority?

**Before taking a vote**, make sure to discuss candidates' responses as a group. Regardless of the outcome, it is always best practice to personally thank any faculty member for taking interest in being an advisor.



# Advisor Responsibilities

**GSA**s are groups initiated by students, for students. It is best practice for **GSA** Advisors to be there as a supportive adult, not as a group leader.

- Empower
- Support
- Engage
- Model

## Advisors should support **GSA**s by:

- Meeting with student leaders of the **GSA** as they plan and execute meetings, activities, and advocacy efforts
- Providing the **GSA** with a safe, positive, and supportive space to meet
- Working with student leaders and members of the group to navigate school policies and logistics around advertising, planning, and participating in activities
- Advocating for the **GSA** and students who are part of the **LGBTQ** community
- Collaborating with other **GSA** advisors in the district and facilitating **GSA**s working together on projects and events
- Ensuring that the **GSA** is progressing towards group goals throughout the school year, has a succession plan in place, and is fundraising.
- Regularly checking in with group members regarding their school experience
- Maintaining regular contact with the Youth Engagement staff at Iowa Safe Schools



# GSA Mission Statements

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A MISSION STATEMENT SHOULD TELL OTHERS WHY THE GSA EXISTS AND WHAT MAKES IT DIFFERENT FROM ANY OTHER STUDENT GROUP.

A good mission statement addresses the goals and philosophy of the GSA, and talks about the work the group does. Here are some tips and tricks for writing an awesome mission statement.

- **Invite Input:** An effective mission statement is best when created by all members of the GSA! Make sure everyone has a chance to give input.
- **Keep it Short & Sweet:** Two or three focused sentences is the ideal length for a powerful mission statement.
- **Take Your Time:** Great mission statements take time to develop and require a couple drafts. Revisit the mission statement whenever you have a new member join the group.
- **Share Your Mission Statement:** Distribute copies to everyone in your group. Consider posting copies around your school, sharing it on social media, submitting it to your school's administration, and printing it for your group's archives. Mission statements aren't meant to be kept a secret.



# Leadership Elections



## Vote collection

Before the actual election, you will want to prepare to collect votes from your group members. Regardless of your format, you will want to ensure the votes are 100% confidential, with only the advisor tallying the final vote count. You might consider using 1. an online form (Google forms), 2. Paper ballots 3. colored marbles and a bag.



## The 2-2-2 Method:

Each person running for a leadership position should be given:

- 2** minutes for each candidate to give their pitch about why they should be on the group's leadership team
- 2** minutes for group members to ask each candidate questions about their pitch and ability to lead.
- 2** minutes for all candidates to leave the room and for the group to respectfully discuss each candidate's responses.










### Pro tip!

Ask each candidate how they engage in self-care!

## Election Do's and Don'ts

Discuss these expectations with the group before the process begins!

- |  |   |
|--|---|
|  Keep all discussions respectful and confidential                                    |  Don't use discussion to tear other people down  |
|  Talk about candidates one at a time<br>ex: "Sophie has good time management"        |  Don't compare candidates<br>ex: "Sophie's time management is MUCH better than Andrew's" |
|  Process your feelings of rejection and/or disappointment                            |  Don't become discouraged. General members of the group can still be leaders             |
|  Provide each candidate with a detailed description of their desired leadership role |   |

# GSA Leadership Roles

GSA Success depends on students taking on leadership positions



## All leadership officers should demonstrate:

- Dedication to the group
- Strong verbal and written communication skills
- Consistent attendance at meetings
- Time management skills



## Sample leadership officer descriptions

Regardless of how your group decides to structure your leadership team, the role of each position should be outlined in detail.



### Pro tip!

Start with these three positions and add more as the group grows!

## President -

The President;

- Is the spokesperson for the group and represents the group at community events.
- Presides over general group meetings as well as leadership meetings.
- Partners with the advisor and leadership board to plan activities and events for general meetings.
- Partners with the advisor to plan risk management efforts for the group (makes sure the group is following all relevant policies and is ensuring member safety at group functions).
- Perform other duties prescribed by the group.
- Plans elections and ensures smooth transition of leadership.
- Train their successor.

## Vice President -

The Vice President:

- Partner with the President and Leadership Board in overseeing the group
- Presides over general group meetings as well as leadership board meetings if the President cannot
- Partners with the advisor and leadership board to plan activities and events for general meetings
- Preside over any existing committee and/or oversee committee chairs and report committee goings-on to the President
- Perform other duties prescribed by the group
- Plans elections and ensures smooth transition of leadership
- Train their successor

## Secretary -

The Secretary;

- Takes accurate notes of the proceedings of all group meetings
- Distributes meeting notes to the group
- Takes attendance at all group meetings
- Keeps accurate and up-to-date contact list of members and interested students
- Leads group effort to send thank you notes to community partners
- Perform other duties prescribed by the group
- Train their successor

# GSA Leadership Roles Cont.

Even though these descriptions outline each person's responsibilities, create a culture of communication and encourage asking for help when needed!



**Larger GSAs might want to add even more leadership positions:**

## Treasurer -

The Treasurer will:

- Manages the group's money and budget, reports the up-to-date ledger when requested by the group
- Advises the group on purchases and spending
- Ensures the proper collection of funds from fundraisers and/or philanthropy efforts
- Works with the advisor to ensure that money does not prevent any group members from participating in group outings or activities.
  - Stays up-to-date and informs the group of any scholarships or financial aid opportunities
- Perform other duties prescribed by the group
- Train their successor

## Internal Relations Chair -

The Internal Relations chair will:

- Facilitate conflict resolution between group members
- Work w/ President & VP in membership retention efforts (Make sure people want to continue being in GSA!)
- Promote information, resources, and education related to emotional well-being\*
- Promote information, resources, and education related to academic success\*
- Perform other duties prescribed by the group
- Train their successor

\*This responsibility could be carried out by presenting to the group, checking in with individual members, or creating other resources that are available to group members.

## External Relations Chair

The External Relations chair will:

- Promote the image of the group through advertising
- Coordinate efforts to bring in new members to the group (more about this on page ##)
- Work with President to represent the group at community events, speak on behalf of the group, and/or receive awards.
- Work with President to maintain community contacts
- Maintain any existing group webpage and/or social media accounts
- Perform other duties prescribed by the group
- Train their successor



### Pro tip!

You can also consider adding leadership positions like group historian, a separate recruitment chair, events and/or philanthropy coordinator, etc!  
Iowa Safe Schools' GSA Coordinator is always willing to discuss these with your group.





# GSA Constitution Template

A CONSTITUTION IS A GREAT DOCUMENT TO BRING STRUCTURE TO A GSA. IT ALLOWS RULES TO BE RECORDED AND AMENDED AS NEEDED.

## Article I- Name of the Student Organization

Section A Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) a.k.a. "PRIDE Club"

## Article II- Purpose and Objectives

Section A The specific purposes and objectives of the GSA shall be:

Creating Safe Space for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, and Questioning students at ABC High to express themselves without discrimination or harassment

Provide education to the student body and staff at ABC High School about LGBTQ issues

Work toward an open forum where the student body and staff at ABC High School can find a greater understanding of minority communities

## Article III- Membership

Section A The membership of this organization shall consist of currently enrolled students and faculty of ABC High School

Section B Membership in this organization shall be open to all members of the ABC High School community, regardless of race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, or any other minority status as outlined in the Iowa Civil Rights code, Section 216

Section C Any individual shall be allowed to join this organization at any time of the school year

Section D All members shall have equal rights and privileges in regards to election of officers within this organization

Section E No member monetary membership dues shall be required to join or maintain membership status in this organization

## Article IV- Officers

Section A The officers of this organization shall consist of:

1. President

[Insert officer position description as agreed by the group]

2. Vice President

[Insert officer position description as agreed by the group]

3. Secretary

[Insert officer position description as agreed by the group]

4. Treasurer

[Insert officer position description as agreed by the group]

Section B Officers must be regular attendees of all meetings. Absences and exceptions should be discussed with the faculty advisor.

Section C Candidates for office must:

1. Be in good standing with ABC High School as outlined in the student handbook

2. Have time to commit to duties as outlined in Section A. Significant conflicts due to other activities may disqualify a candidate for an office position

Section D Officers will remain in office for one school calendar year

Section E Any officer of the organization may be removed from office with a two-thirds vote of members

## **Article V- Elections and Voting**

Section A Each member shall have one vote. Absent members on the day of voting will not be allowed to vote. Proxy votes shall only be accepted in written form, and should be given to the faculty advisor or secretary.

Section B Election of officers shall be held at the second to last official meeting of the Spring semester.

Section C Any officer or member of the organization may resign at any time

Section D In the case of resignation of an officer, a special election will be held one week after the resignation to fill the vacant position

## **Article VI- Meetings**

Section A All members shall be notified of any meetings and nature of the business that will be discussed

Section B Regular meetings shall be held one time a week

Section C Special meetings may be called at any time by the officers with a three day notice to all members via established communication

## **Article VII- Amendment of Constitution**

Section A The Consitution may be amended by officers and two thirds majority vote of members of the organization

# Ideas for GSA House Rules

Unique from a group's established constitution, group House Rules are something that are revisited to start every school year - or even throughout the school year as the group sees fit. House Rules act as a social contract that shape the expectations of each group member.

## Here are some examples:

- 1. Respect Others:** You may hear ideas at GSA meetings that are new or different for you, and opinions that might run counter to your own. As you participate and interact, try to take in new information without judgment and to keep an open mind. Make sure that your words and body language reflect a respectful attitude toward others. Learn by listening to others, and make an effort to be supportive.
- 2. Speak From the “I”:** Speak from your own personal experiences and do not judge the thoughts or experiences of others. Use I-statements such as “I feel...” or “In my experience...” Avoid “You should” statements and generalizations or globalizations of any kind.
- 3. Be Open to New Ideas:** New ideas and techniques may be utilized or suggested during GSA meetings. Be open to considering new information and incorporating new practices.
- 4. Ask Questions:** Please feel free to ask any question that comes up for you without fear that it is too silly, stupid or explicit. Make sure to phrase all questions in respectful ways.
- 5. Respect Confidentiality:** Please be sure that everything said in the room stays in the room. When sharing personal anecdotes, avoid using the real names of other people.
- 6. Step Up, Step Back:** Though we encourage you to express your ideas and opinions, we ask that you not monopolize the group’s time, and that you help create a safe space in which everyone can speak. No one, however, is obligated to speak.
- 7. Respect Commitments:** While you are encouraged to take care of your personal needs throughout the meeting, please honor your commitment to being here by observing time guidelines during breaks, turning off beepers and phones, and limiting unnecessary interruptions.



