
Common GSA Challenges (And How to Overcome Them)



Running a club can be a lot of work. You have to create a plan for each meeting, organize events, advertise and recruit new members, and make sure that the club is meeting the needs of the people who join. So it's frustrating when, on top of all of your hard work, things don't go smoothly and challenges arise. At a recent GSA conference, we asked students to create a list of common GSA challenges and then work collectively to brainstorm possible solutions to each of those challenges. Here is what they created:

Resistance to the club (from administration):

- There are still a lot of misconceptions about GSAs. Before proposing a GSA to administrators, make sure you are able to explain the purpose of the club. Be ready with a mission statement, example discussion topics, and talk about how you think a GSA will benefit the climate of the school for all students.
- Get letters of support for the GSA from parents, school staff, other clubs, and community leaders. If you think administrators are likely to hear from people complaining about the club, line up people ready to speak in support of it.
- If necessary, contact your local ACLU chapter. They can provide you with legal justification for the club. Know your rights!

Resistance to the club (from students):

- Work with supportive staff and administrators to address any harassment or bullying that occurs.
- Organizing events like Ally Week and Day of Silence can help to shift attitudes and give students who aren't members of the GSA a chance to show their support.
- Ask for opportunities to present about GSA and LGBT topics in the classroom.
- Work with other clubs to organize Words Hurt Week, which challenges hurtful language and helps build a more unified, positive school community.
- Use posters and other visuals to create more awareness about LGBT issues and the need for GSAs. Create a display of LGBT-themed books in the library.
- Recognize that when a GSA is new, it is often met with some resistance. Social change takes time, and try not to get discouraged.

Lack of members:

- Regularly hang posters and signs to advertise meetings, and make sure that those posters let students know that everyone is welcome to come.
- Designate a meeting as “bring a new person to GSA day!” Successful recruitment should be active, not passive. Some students might be waiting for a personal invitation before coming to a meeting.
- If your school hosts club fairs, make sure GSA has a presence there.
- Create a Facebook, Tumblr, or Twitter account for your GSA so that people can get updates and stay involved outside of meetings.
- Create GSA t-shirts and buttons and have a day when everyone wears them to school to create more excitement about GSA.
- Hold a “GSA interest meeting” at the start of each semester that encourages new people to come and find out what GSA is all about.
- Create GSA business cards and ask members to hand them out.
- Create a GSA PSA and ask if the video can be shown during homeroom.
- Write articles about GSA and LGBT topics for the school newspaper.
- Invite guest speakers to come in and talk to your GSA, and advertise the guest speaker on posters and in the morning announcements.
- If holding your meetings after school is preventing people from coming, see if you can meet as a club during the school day, even if it’s just once a month.
- Ask other clubs if you can have a couple minutes during their meeting to talk about what GSA does. Offer time at your meetings for other clubs to present.
- Volunteer to support events being organized by other clubs. That doesn’t mean you should take over their event or try to change it. Simply showing up for others is a great way to gain new allies.
- Work with your advisor to keep a confidential list of who comes to each GSA meeting. If a student stops coming, be sure to reach out to them and let them know that they are missed. If a lot of members stop coming, create an anonymous survey and give students a chance to share why they dropped out.
- Remember that it is normal for club membership to ebb and flow throughout the year as students’ priorities and involvement in other clubs change.
- Don’t forget the freshmen! Underclassmen sometimes get overlooked, especially when it comes to leadership opportunities. Recruit younger students and have older students mentor them so they’re ready to lead the club some day.
- Have food at your meetings!

Lack of follow-through from members:

- If students aren't following through on their commitments, it's probably because they either have too much on their plate or they're not that excited about the task they have been assigned.
- Make sure to delegate responsibilities in an even manner. If no one is excited about taking on a task, maybe that project doesn't need to happen.
- Check in with students who have committed to working on a task. Don't micro-manage them, but ask how they are progressing and offer support if needed.
- Work with your advisor to create realistic goals and timelines. If you don't start organizing Day of Silence until the week before, it will be hard to get everything done. Work backwards on the calendar and create realistic benchmarks.
- Take a step back and ask whether your GSA is "too business." If your members are expected to do lots of work outside of meetings, try and strike a better balance between social time and work time.
- Don't expect your advisor to do all the work for you. It's your club!

Meetings are disorganized:

- Every meeting should have an agenda, even if it's just going to be a social meeting. Work with your advisor to create a realistic agenda for upcoming meetings. Don't try and pack too much into an agenda. Prioritize the most important things at the top of the agenda, and set time limits for each topic.
- If people are talking over one another and not being respectful during the meeting, spend some time establishing group agreements. All the members should help create a list of guidelines and expectations for the club. If everyone has a hand in creating these group agreements, it is a lot easier to remind people of them and ask that the group agreements be upheld.
- It's good to have an established leadership team, but the student leaders don't always need to be the ones running the meetings. Spread out the work and give all members a chance to facilitate a meeting. GSA should be a place where students can build their leadership skills, even if they're not in a leadership position within the club.
- Make sure that your GSA has an established meeting day, time, and location. If meetings times are always changing, membership will probably decrease. Consistency is an important aspect to running a successful organization.