

Starting a LGBTQ+ Youth Group

Created by the GLSEN WA SHINE 2022-23 Cohort

Supported by GLSEN WA board members



Vision planning

Questions to consider when planning for your group

- When should your group meet? Should it follow the school year?
- How often should your group meet? How often is enough to ensure participants are connected, but not too much?
- What do you want the "vibe" of the group to be?
- What do you want participants to do on the day-to-day?
- What do you want participants to get out of the group?
- What would a typical meeting look like?
- How much do you want to engage as an advisor?

General advice for planning a group

- Create a mix of activism and social time, or "work and play"
 - Let the group decide what they want the balance to be--extracurriculars like youth groups shouldn't feel overwhelming or like school. The best programming is youth-driven!
 - Encourage students to take up "action projects" if they feel comfortable or if it seems interesting. More on this later!
- Consider in-person meetings
 - While online meetings through Zoom or Google Meet can be more accessible (especially for a state wide program like ours), in-person meetings can be more fun and allow the group to bond.
- Consider online, asynchronous activities

- If possible per your organization's policies, allow for communication with members outside of meeting times via asynchronous activities like Slack or Discord.
- Consider how you'll create a fun, casual, joyful energy
 - The group should NOT feel like school or like a burden! Inside jokes can help bond your community (one of our favorites this year was having "banana slugs" as our mascot).
- Emphasize and model queer joy as an advisor
 - Focus on uplifting the LGBTQ+ community while not focusing entirely on the difficulties that come with being LGBTQ+.
- Make sure that the host organization is empowering and uplifting LGBTQ+ youth as a whole by:
 - Valuing and actively incorporating the input of LGBTQ+ youth
 - Making an effort to expand the representation of LGBTQ+ youth in the organization as a whole
 - Not pressuring youth to overcommit into activism that doesn't hit home or isn't fun
 - Respecting the privacy & boundaries of youth



Membership Recruitment

Create an easy application

- Your application should be just long enough for the applicants to demonstrate interest, but short enough so that they don't become bored, overwhelmed, or disinterested by filling it out.
- Make sure to include any required information (waivers, emergency contact, etc.) within the application so that applicants don't have to fill out multiple forms.
- Some starter questions to consider for your application:
 - Names & pronouns
 - School, grade level, & city/state
 - Age
 - Why are you interested in joining this group?
 - What involvement do you have in your community?
 - What's a fun fact about you?
 - Do you have any accessibility needs/need any accommodations? Is there anything we can do to make your time in the group more comfortable?
 - Is there anything else you'd like us to know?
 - Any required forms as dictated by your organization (waivers, emergency contacts, photo releases, etc.)

Advertise, advertise, advertise!

- Create a landing page on your organization's website for your youth group.

- Post on your organization's existing social media.
- Start a social media account for your group (even better if youth can eventually run it/make posts!).
- Share the opportunity with local community centers, schools, and Gay-Straight Alliances/Pride Clubs.
 - Give resources to young people in your organization to share with their community if they feel comfortable.



Example activities

Action projects

- Action projects are small, student-led projects that aim to make a difference in the community. They can help participants make a difference in their community, help them gain professional skills, and gain a sense of empowerment.
- They should be small enough to be completed entirely in meetings, so that there's no "homework."
- Advisors should assist and help guide in these projects, but shouldn't control them. Your role as an advisor is to provide resources and guidance when needed.

Professional development

- Youth often want to gain skills that aren't usually taught in schools, like applying for jobs, or leadership skills. If possible, you can bring in experts to discuss these with the participants, or you can create your own presentation.
- Ask the participants in your group what they want to hear to ensure that the topic is something engaging to them. Professional development shouldn't usually take up the whole meeting, and should be light-hearted.
- Brief presentations can include topics like:
 - Leadership
 - Basic financial literacy
 - Professional email writing
 - Applying for jobs
 - Resume & cover letter writing
 - Networking & professional social media like LinkedIn

Guest speakers

- Let youth pick who they want to hear from/have input in the process of choosing guest speakers.
- Guest speakers can help participants gain perspective from communities that they aren't a part of, and gain more insight about different LGBTQ+ topics.

- Guest speakers can also be an important of youth groups because they help youth visualize a future for themselves.

Fun online activities

This year, our participants really enjoyed playing:

- Kahoot!, which allows you to create fun quizzes that people can play as a group from their laptops or phones: kahoot.com
- Online, multi-player games like scribl.io (web-based Pictionary)
- Online bingo
- Online Jeopardy (there are a lot of free websites that let you create your own version!)



Your role as an advisor

Youth-adult interaction policies

- Create (if your organization doesn't have one already) and follow youth-adult interaction guidelines to ensure that both youth and adults know appropriate boundaries. Adhere to all federal, state, local, and organizational laws, policies, and guidelines.
- Ensure that all volunteers who interact with youth have appropriate training in this policy and beyond.
- Respect the confidentiality and privacy of the youth in your space.
 - Don't record meetings or take minutes.
- Ensure that youth understand the boundaries of confidentiality, which builds trust.
 - Give presentations on the youth-adult interaction policy at the start of the group or when new members join.
 - Ensure that youth know who they can reach out to (outside of their primary advisors!) if they have questions or concerns.
 - Make sure that young people understand your obligations as their advisor (ex: If you're a mandated reporter, tell them that!)

Advising, not controlling

- As an advisor, you'll have a vision for your group and it's important to find the balance between advising and controlling.
- Participants won't always want to do what you find fun, and it's so important to be able to accept feedback as an advisor and create the group around what the youth need.
- As an advisor, your primary goal is to be a resource and a guide. Make sure that you're knowledgeable about and able to provide youth with resources when needed.