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Creating Inclusive GSAs - The Basics

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Multi-issue organizing is a strong and powerful way to incorporate all aspects of a community and the people it is made up of. The LGBTQ youth movement cannot survive unless it includes people of color and addresses issues of sexism, racism, classism, ageism, and environmental injustice. We must link ourselves together to create a multi issue social justice movement which incorporates the needs and rights of multiple communities.

However, many GSAs have struggled with multi-issue organizing because of a lack of internal diversity. There are a number of reasons why students of color may not be as actively involved with GSAs as white students. GSA organizers from around the Bay Area came up with these ideas about why many GSAs are disproportionately white:

- **Perception that Gay = White**: Most national LGBTQ leaders and famous queer folks are white, and people of color are often under-represented at LGBTQ events.
- **Tokenization**: If a GSA is already mostly or all white, students may feel that being the only person of color at meetings would put pressure on them to educate the rest of the club about diversity or racism.
- **Language barriers**: Especially if your school has a large population of students who do not speak English as a primary language, creating all of the GSA's flyers and materials in English may send a message that the club would not be a comfortable place for some students.
- **Cultural barriers**: Sexual orientation and homophobia are understood and acknowledged differently by different cultures. Many organizations that deal with LGBTQ issues are ethnocentric and fail to recognize that sexual orientation and homophobia may have different associations and implications for people with different backgrounds.
- **Prioritizing Identities**: Many LGBTQ youth of color have described the alientating experience of having to choose one identity over another. For example, if they've been part of a racial/ethnic club at school they feel forced to hide their sexual orientation or gender identity. Conversely, if they've attended the GSA, they've felt forced to ignore or downplay their racial/ethnic identity.

Here are some broad strategies that GSAs can use to address these issues and build diverse, anti-racist organizations:

Engage Straight People of Color as Allies.

- Organize around health, oppression, public policy, school policy, and other points of multi-issue or coalition-based organizing
- Go to diversity club meetings and/or set up an umbrella "Diversity" or "Multicultural" club at your school.

Welcome LGBTQ People of Color.

- Focus GSA organizing and activities on multiple issues.
- Invite queer people of color to visit your GSA/school as speakers or trainers.
- Create materials in different languages.

Educate the GSA.

- Have an anti-oppression/anti-racism workshop.
- Engage in a dialogue about racism within the school and/or within the LGBTQ community.
- Have different student clubs give trainings/facilitate dialogues for your GSA (and see if other clubs would like the GSA to lead an anti-homophobia workshop at one of their meetings).

Build Coalitions.
Coalitions unite different organizations around a common issue, such as ending hate crimes at your school. Coalitions work together to organize campaigns and sponsor activities that help meet common goals. Consider having long-term coalitions with other diversity-focused groups at your school that encourage members to form personal as well as organizational relationships. This will help straight people of color become more familiar with the GSA and not force queer people of color to choose between one club activity or the other.

Here are some ideas for activities you can organize as a coalition:

- Put together a photo exhibit on diverse families.
- Bring the AIDS quilt to school.
- Organize a rally, assembly, protest, or peer-education program about hate crimes.
- Have a voter registration drive for seniors.
- Host a diversity-themed film festival, poetry slam, or concert.

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