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Developing a Strategy

Effective activism requires thinking strategically about how to solve problems, win concrete improvements in people's lives, and alter relations of power. Many GSAs use activism to make schools safer and empower students. This resource sheet is designed to help you choose issues and think through the process of developing a strategy to make change.

> **When we realize that something is not quite right, that there is a problem or when we want to**
> **create change in our schools, one of the most effective tools we can use is a strategy chart.**

What is a strategy chart?

A way of drawing out your ideas, create a plan and figure out how to create the change and can be used as a guide to help you develop a strategy that best suits the situation at your school and your organization.

Remember, before you sit down to fill out the strategy chart with your activist group, you may want to gather more information. For example, you might want to do a survey to figure out what the problems are at your school, or have a discussion at your GSA about the most pressing problems, you have as students, that you would like to see changed.

Using information from this research, turn the problem into an **issue**: An issue communicates what you are fighting for to help solve your problem. The issue is the goal of your campaign. If the problem is name-calling and slurs, your issue could be to reduce anti-LGBT slurs.

Additionally, collecting other information and resources to have on hand when working on your strategy chart is critical. For example having your student handbook that outlines school policies, a list of all the staff and teachers at the school, a list of all the district employees and school board members, and any other materials that provide information about key people or policies related to the school.

Goal: Goals are measurements of success or victory. An Intended Impact(s) (this is your long-term goal or what you want to achieve). It could simply be winning the issue you have identified. An intended impact could be implementing AB 537. Make sure to celebrate your accomplishments. *[This happens first.]*

> **Short-term goals** are the steps toward achieving your intended impact. A short-term goal could be getting on the school board meeting agenda or having your school do a voluntary teacher training. You often may have multiple short-term goals that you are working on at the same time. *[Come back here, once you know who your Decision Maker is before you create your Tactics.]*

Resources: These are the strengths and weaknesses within your own activist group. Be as thorough as possible when listing your group's resources. Including: skills, assets & gaps related to delivering the strategy, people power, technology, money, coalition resources, etc.

> **example**: A strength could be the number of people you have in your group or access to a computer. Weaknesses might be lack of money or internal division within your group.

Allies are the people who will support you but may not necessarily be members of your group (GSA), for example supportive parents, other groups at your school, or community members. You will also want to think about the groups you have relationships with and see if they might be interested in being Coalitions Partners. They can often be valuable resources themselves or have access to resources.

Opponents are the people who will actively organize to prevent you from winning your issue. Individual students
who are hostile to you and your group can certainly affect your school environment, but they are not your opponents unless they can actually organize to stop your efforts. Try to figure out how your opponents are organized and how they could oppose you.

Decision Maker: The decision maker is the person with the power to give you what you want. Keep in mind that this person is the specific individual who has this power and we can sway. You may also want to find someone who can **Influence** your decision maker, this is a person who has more influence or sway than you might.

> **example**: If your **decision maker** is the school board president, an **influencer** could be a particularly powerful parent in the school district who is good friends with the school board president and happens to be the parent of one of your GSA members.

Tactics: Activities, that are the specific things that your group members (GSA) and allies can do

using the resources you have to meet your goals and put pressure on your decision maker to give you what you want (your intended impact). You may also want to include research and media as important elements in implementing
your tactics.

> **examples**: Publicizing the results of a school survey about name-calling, holding a rally, running a letter-writing campaign, meeting with your principal, testifying at a school board meeting.

Reflection: Along the way be sure your group (GSA and Coalition Partners) checks in to figure out if your tactics are working and, if you are meeting your short-term goals. You may have to change your strategy part way through your campaign if the opposition is successful in countering your efforts or if your first attempt to influence the decision-maker doesn't work, or if your resources change.

With a well-developed strategy, you are more likely to succeed in creating change in your school. **GOOD LUCK!**

Key steps to creating change?

1. Do community research to identify the critical problem and the best way to address it.
2. Using information from this research, turn the problem into an issue.
3. Develop a strategy using the strategy chart on the reverse side of this handout.
4. Make a to-do list with everything that you want to accomplish. Write down who will do what by when.
5. Mobilize your members and allies.
6. Put pressure on the target to respond.
7. Evaluate where your campaign did and did not succeed. Make a new plan to accomplish what you were not able to in your original campaign. Make sure to celebrate your victories and accomplishments,however small.

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