

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.

How can a student group organize to create change?

1. Do community research to identify the problem and the best way to address it.
2. 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.
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 constituents 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.

What is a strategy chart? (strategy chart on reverse side)

The strategy chart on the reverse side of this handout can be used as a guide to help you develop a strategy that best suits the situation at your school and the group of people who are involved in planning the action. Before you sit down to fill out the strategy chart with your activist group, you may want to gather more information. For example, you may want to bring the 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. A long-term goal is the ultimate goal you want to achieve. It could simply be winning the issue you have identified. A long-term goal could be implementing AB 537. Make sure to celebrate your accomplishments.

Intermediate goals are the smaller goals that need to be accomplished to achieve your long-term goal. An intermediate goal could be getting a mandatory teacher training approved.

Short-term goals are the steps toward achieving your intermediate goals. A short-term goal could be getting on the school board meeting agenda or doing a voluntary teacher training.

Resources: These are the strengths and weaknesses within your own activist group. Be as thorough as possible when listing your group’s resources.

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.

Groups: Groups of people are the people who are affected by the problem. There are three types of groups: constituents, allies, and opponents.

Constituents are the people you can bring into your campaign because they care about the issue and will be directly and positively affected if you win your campaign.

Allies are the people who will support you but may not necessarily join your group, like supportive parents.

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.

Target: The target is the person with the power to give you what you want.

Primary target is the specific individual who has this power.


Secondary target is the person who has more power over the primary target than you do and who you have more influence over than you have over the primary target.

example: If your primary target is the school board president, a secondary target 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: Tactics are the specific things that your constituents and allies can do using the resources you have to put pressure on your target to give you what you want (your goals). 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.

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 For more information and resources for Gay-Straight Alliances, contact GSA Network:
Statewide Office: 1550 Bryant Street #800, San Francisco, CA 94103, ph: 415.552.4229, f: 415.552.4729
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www.gsanetwork.org f: 213.553.1833

STRATEGY CHART

Campaign: _____

Goals:	Resources:	Groups:	Targets:	Tactics:
Long Term:	Strengths:	Constituents:	Primary:	
Short Term:	Weaknesses:	Allies: Opponents:	Secondary:	