

A Handy Helper for the QSA (Queer-Straight Alliance)

Compiled by 2008 Soulforce Q Equality Riders

Getting Started

Brand your group

- Pick a name. It doesn't have to be GSA/QSA. Some group titles that have been used are PRIDE, Common Ground, Refuge, etc.

Needs Assessment

- What are the needs of LGBTQ people in your community? What are your goals? How will your goals meet those needs? What kind of group do you want to be, activist, social? In your mission statement, are your goals clearly stated? What about accountability – how do you know if you are meeting your goals?

Supportive/Informational Sources (Just google any of their names)

Look for Local Resources

- Other QSAs – at local schools and universities
- Affirming Churches
- LGBTQ Centers
- Other local LGBTQ organizations

National/International Resources

- GLSEN – Gay, Lesbian, Education Network (www.glsen.org)
- GLAAD – Gays and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (www.glaad.org)
- Soulforce (www.soulforce.org)
- Atticus Circle – Group dedicated to achieving equality for all parents and partners (www.atticuscircle.org)
- PFLAG (Parents/Friends & Families of Lesbians and Gays)
- Amnesty International (They also have national, more local chapters)
- ACLU – American Civil Liberties Union (Local Chapters)

Potential Meeting/Workshop Topics

For within the group:

- Continuously Coming Out
- Trans 101 – A workshop that covers the Transgender Umbrella, Gender Gumby, etc.
- Heterosexual Privilege – Discussion about the privileges of heterosexuals, cisgender individuals
- Ally 101 – Workshop on how to be/become a better Ally to LGBTQ community

Topics that could be shared with other groups:

- Queer Holidays – (Make a Calendar of them with History majors)

a Sanctuary Collective

www.sanctuarycollective.org



- Queer History of your community (Policy changes, notable queer alumni, etc)
- Heteronormativity in Education (Talk about it in terms of your school possibly with people from Education department)
- What the Bible Says and Doesn't Say About Homosexuality
- Diversity in Higher Education (Have a panel with members from ethnic, racial, political, etc organizations)
- World Aids Day (ex. Work with health services group/committee)

Planning/Structure

Agenda – come prepared to every meeting with an agenda/outline

Define Roles

- Establish a name and description for each role – don't become a hostage to such terms as “president”, “secretary”, etc. They may not always suit the needs of your group.
- Your leadership should reflect the diversity in your group, as far as, race, sexual identity/orientation, gender identity/expression, age, position in school (freshman, sophomore, etc)
- Make the roles relevant to your group and remember that they can change – not only the positions but the folks who secure certain positions

Committees

- Some QSAs have established committees (Social Gathering Committee, Fundraising Committee, etc.) to not only give all members ownership in the group but to help share tasks/responsibilities and also to increase and maintain group participation

Visibility Strategies

Editorials (Have members rotate writing one each week, month, etc)

Smaller actions

- Hand holding campaign – have same gender folks holding hands
- Gender Switch – Have folks dress to bend traditional gender norms

Guerilla Art

- Chalk meetings, announcements, affirming messages on the ground
- Put rainbow ribbon on trees
- Give stickers with your name to local supportive businesses to hang in windows
- Soap on car windows with messages, facts/statistics about LGBT people and their lives

Make publications

- Short book of stories from LGBTQ students, alumni, community members and put on in every student's mailbox (ask a local printing company for discount) – mention that you'll advertise on the publication
- Have film students make mini documentary about the experience of LGBTQ students on your campus



How to Sustain your QSA

Internal Issues *within* group to address

- “Isms” - Continually have discussion about racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, etc within the group. While the LGBTQ community is part of the diversity of the general population, there is also much diversity within the LGBTQ community and often people are forgotten or acknowledged. We also sometimes think that because we experience oppression, that we understand all oppression and that we are not perpetuating it – FALSE!! We ALL perpetuate oppression or “isms” in some way and we need to acknowledge that within our community. Have intentional discussions about it – call in other student groups to help.

New leadership (upper/lower class(wo)men)

- Demonstrate respect for all members, no matter where they are in their academic careers.
- Have underclass(wo)men shadow/apprentice under classmen

Alumni Contacts

- Have alumni hold the group accountable as well. As students graduate, leave a space for them to continue to a part of the group - ENCOURAGE their participation.

Develop strong relationship with student activities office/ local businesses/ faculty sponsors

- Often, leaders graduate at the same time and groups such as these dissolve. If other people are involved to hold the group accountable and are a part of the work, then the group is less likely to disintegrate when certain members graduate

Web presence

- Make a webpage - find some free space or ask local businesses to help sponsor free web space and offer advertising.

Community Building Events

- Schedule “fun” events like LGBT movies nights with members, bowling outings, dinners, etc. Celebrate birthdays together – try to be a *community*.

Having “off season” events (facebook groups)

- Schedule summer events to avoid that disconnect (day trips to Amusement Parks, hiking trips, etc)

Member ownership

- Make sure all members play a role – no one wants to be a part of something that they don’t contribute to.

Fundraising

- Don’t be afraid to think big even with small means – recognize that even when you don’t make money, you still gain visibility in your attempts
- Donations from businesses



- Have an events coordinator (again work with other student organizations – i.e., Drama Club, have a play, fashion show, etc)
- Bake sale (Seek and encourage the participation of local bakeries – it helps as a resource and it develops relationships)

Working within Administration

Research

- **Who** – Vice President, Dean, etc. Find out as much as you can. Very often, they might know a person or two that identifies as LGBTQ. (Ex., the President of one of the colleges that Equality Ride visited had two lesbian daughters!! Needless to say, it was a personal issue for him.) BOARD OF TRUSTEES – these are usually the people who control many of the decisions on college campuses.
- **How** – Find out how decisions are made i.e., what the process is for policy change. Do students file a petition? Does it need to go through student government?

Support Systems

- Faculty, community members, alumni – schedule weekly, monthly, etc meetings with your administration and have “reinforcements” – any person/organization that could support you and the goals of your group.
- Other organizations – GLSEN, GLADD, PLFAG, etc.

Integration

- Find ways to integrate your group into forums. Ask to have a member from your group on a diversity panel. Some schools even have Resident Assistants undergo diversity training – advocate to have a LGBTQ person as part of training in diverse groups of people.

“Game Plan”

- Discuss what the risks are in approaching your administration. Have a group meeting that outlines possible repercussions (if any) and what courses of action the student group might take in response to administrative “walls.”
- Research and become familiar with ways to challenge administration. Find out about process that students/student groups can take. Can you file a grievance with the Dean? Can you write to the Alumni Association? Can you ask a local media source to make a story out of your problems, if any?

TAKE RISKS!!!

Your QSA will never make it without risks – neither will this movement for full equality. Specifically in the early stages of developing this kind of group, the initial members will have to take risks that future groups may not have to take, such is the nature of “paving the way.”

