HOW TO PLAN AND HOST A VIRTUAL GRADUATION

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As we navigate the challenges that come with the impact COVID-19 is having on all of our lives, we are seeing people who have capacity continue to show up and respond to the growing needs our youth have at this time. Seniors across the country are facing multiple cancellations on positive and uplifting activities and traditions that celebrate and honor their years of being in the K-12 system.

Organizing this event is not as daunting as it sounds and can be quite fun! This resource is a guide in helping organize one of those traditions virtually. The goal is to have an intimate ceremony that gives students individual recognition and opportunity to give one last speech before moving on from the K-12 school system. Coordinating this through outlets like zoom is a lot easier than you think and we will show you how in this guide. Let's show up one last time for these seniors before they move on!

What is a Rainbow Graduation?

A rainbow graduation is a programmatic celebration for LGBTQ+ seniors and allies.

Why Is It Important to Have One?

Similar to the traditional graduation commencement ceremony, a rainbow graduation gives specific recognition to the LGBTQ+ students which presents an opportunity to honor them in a way they might not have in the traditional ceremony. *e.g. Correct name and pronouns read allowed when given a certificate.*

1 **Gather a Committee:** Reach out to folks in your networks who you think would like to help organize this event.

GSAs have a great pulse of the LGBTQ+ seniors and allies to honor. Activate your GSA underclass folks in preparing this celebration!

Supportive adults such as educators, caretakers, parents, guardiaans and family members who would like to be involved.

Community organizations in your local area might want to sponsor the event, help get the word out, and help with any guest speakers or performers.

2 **Pick a Virtual Platform.** Choose a platform to hold this event such as Zoom or a similar digital application. As long as everyone has the Commencement Ceremony Program, and for those speaking you might want to have notes in a Google doc, then the event can happen on video call. There are many tips and blogs on how to ensure your event takes extra safety precautions. (Zoom Security). Designate someone to be in charge of all the useful tools these types of programs have and how to best utilize them for your event.

3 **Select a Date.** Once you get together with your organizing committee (either in a meeting or through a working document), select a date for the event. Tip: check the date of any other major event the school might be hosting or in the local community to make sure you are choosing the date and time students can attend.

4 **Create Planning Committees.** *(See ceremony ideas on Page 3)* Once you decide what content you will have in the ceremony, create different committees to work on the tasks. You might have an "entertainment" committee who focuses on a performer. If you are planning to have Seniors speak, you can have a committee or person designated to collect the speeches ahead of time or help organize the Seniors in a particular order. Although this is virtual, work and follow ups should be delegated and organized. Google Docs has a user friendly way to organize folders and documents that will give live updates as committee members input information.

5 **Create an itinerary for the event.** Create an itinerary for the event – check out ideas for the Virtual Graduation on the next page. Here is GLSEN's general guide on Hosting Virtual Events.

6 **Invitations.** You can create invitations and send them out to everyone registered or signed up to attend the graduation. This could also be a printable keepsake for attendees.

7 **Certificates.** Create your own Rainbow Graduation Certificates. If you are unsure how to get the word out, start with inviting GSA members and ask them to help spread the word. Make sure there is a central email for participants and guests to reach out to regarding logistics and questions.

8 **Complete Follow-Ups and Confirmations.** Once you have confirmation of all participants and how they will participate, make sure to follow up with confirmations a day or two before the event. If you are paying an honorarium for a speaker/performer, make sure to get their payment ready. If you are having a video played, follow up with the editor to make sure it will be ready.

9 **Rehearsal.** To ensure the digital platform and the run of the show- runs smoothly.

10 **Host Your Event!**

IDEAS FOR THE EVENT PROGRAM

- **Welcome speech** by designated person

- **MC** for the event to transition from one speaker to the other.

- **Senior Speeches** in which every Senior participating gets a timed speech

- **Supportive Adult** such as parents, guardians, caretaker, friend, or teacher can share a well wish to their graduating Senior (this can be created through a video and shared through a "shared screen" on Zoom if that is the platform you are using)

- **A poem or song** can be performed at the event. Make sure it is relevant to graduation, moving on, congratulations, dreams, journeys etc.

- **Read the names of the Seniors graduating.** It is important to go the extra distance to make sure students have their correct and chosen name read instead of their name assigned at birth or legal name if they do not wish to be called that name. Make a note when collecting information that students do not have to use their legal name or name assigned at birth and it is not mandatory to participate.

- **Make sure to use correct pronouns** in the program and in the ceremony. Ask every participant to include their pronouns if they are comfortable.

- **Awards** can be a special moment to recognize Seniors. Make sure these are gender neutral and avoid awards such as "outstanding female/male Senior". You can have awards such as "Student Advocate of the Year" or "The GSA President Award for Outstanding Contribution" etc.

- **Video Montage** of students sharing a younger photo or video clip to a current one. A video editor or app can be used to bring these clips together with sound. If this is part of the ceremony, you can screen share on Zoom so all participants can watch.

TEMPLATE VIRTUAL GRADUATION CEREMONY PROGRAM

Below is a sample template of how you can organize the schedule of your events and create your own personalized program for the virtual graduation:

Processional	Pomp and Circumstance
Class Welcome	Selected Senior
Welcome	GSA Advisor or GLSEN
Music/Poem	Selected Student
Student Advocate Address	Selected Senior
Keynote	Student or Special Guest
Student Speeches	Seniors
Caretaker Affirmations	Adult Supporters
Closing Remarks	Student or Organizer

(Time to thank committee and supporters or sponsors)

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ACCESSIBILITY

LGBTQ+ people with disabilities have been leading the way in organizing for centuries. Because our society does not prioritize accessibility, it has often been left to folks with disabilities in the Disability Justice Movements to create those paths for themselves. Most of the tools and resources we are finding in technology were created by people with disabilities, to begin with. In organizing any of your events, always ask if folks have any accessibility requests. Video meetings allow for inviting interpreters if needed to help translate the conversation, try adding captions and image descriptions to your online posts as well. You can also utilize the chatbox to reiterate things that are being shared throughout the prom.

HONORARIUM FOR GUEST SPEAKER OR PERFORMER:

As many performers have lost contracts and work during the COVID-19 pandemic, consider paying performers at your events or Rainbow Graduation Ceremony.

THANK YOU

Thank you for honoring LGBTQ+ Seniors and allies. As we continue to navigate and adjust to these circumstances, we can use this time to get creative and find deeper and stronger ways to connect. If you have any questions, please email us at students@glsen.org.