



- **Prepare your letter and “ask.”** We’ve included a sample letter to guide you, but take your time in editing and including information specific to the issue. Tell your decision-maker why you care so much about this issue and why they should care, and make a concrete ask — asking the decision-maker to follow through with an action such as meeting with students, hosting a town hall, or making a statement that they stand with trans students. If you can, include statistics from [GLSEN’s National School Climate Survey](#) (we have [state-specific data](#) for some places!).
- **Proofread.** Seriously. Make sure your letter is professional and polite. Keep your requests clear, especially when asking to meet with a decision-maker.
- **Send it.** Figure out if e-mail, snail mail, or another way is the best way to send your letter.
- **Wait for a response. Follow up. Be patient.** After all this hard work, it can be really hard to wait weeks to hear a response back. Know that your time is valuable, and sometimes it can take a while to get your meeting. You can always call to follow up or send another letter reiterating that you want to meet with your decision-maker to talk about LGBTQ students if your letter goes unanswered. Also, this is a good time to check within your networks and see if there are other folks you know connected to this decision-maker.
- **Go to your meeting.** You’ve done all the hard work. Now it’s time to prepare to meet with your decision-maker!

**EXAMPLE**

Transgender students’ right to participate in school sports

State-wide nondiscrimination issues, like whether schools, business, or others can discriminate against LGBTQ people

**TARGET**

State athletics association or school board

State legislators

**YOUNG PEOPLE  
CREATE CHANGE.  
AS ACTIVE  
MEMBERS OF YOUR  
COMMUNITIES,  
YOU CARRY AN  
IMMENSE AMOUNT  
OF POWER.**

# 12 Tips for Meeting with Decision-makers

Here are a few ways to make sure you and your team feel good about stepping into meetings. You don't have to be perfect. Just remember this is a conversation.

## PREPARE

1. **Make an appointment:** Decision-makers are often very busy and will most likely not have the time to meet with you on short notice. Scheduling a meeting in advance will help their staff prepare and ensure a more productive meeting.
2. **Plan ahead:** Have a clear idea of what your goals are for the meeting, what you are going to say, and who you will be meeting with. It is best to work out the logistics of who will be taking notes and who will do the talking beforehand. Practice your story and what you're asking for. Planning ahead is the best way to ensure that you are able to make the most out of your meeting.
3. **Authentic vs. professional clothes:** They don't always have to be at odds with each other. Wear the clothes that make you feel confident and powerful. You deserve respect, no matter what you're wearing. However, don't let your outfit overshadow your goals or message.
4. **Be early:** Plan to arrive at least 10 minutes before the meeting in order to avoid being late. Sometimes finding the office of decision-makers can be complicated if you have never been there before. Being early allows you extra time to calm your nerves before getting into your meeting.



# 12 Tips for Meeting with Decision-makers

## MAKE IT HAPPEN

- 5. Be flexible**, and don't be surprised if you meet with a staff member instead of the decision-maker. Often staffers are more knowledgeable on specific issue areas than the decision-maker and are better suited to meet you. They will inform the decision-maker of your views and requests after your meeting.
- 6.** Keep your materials organized and on hand. Staff members and decision-makers meet with hundreds of people every week and deal with many different issues. **Short handouts that explain the issues that you are discussing can be very helpful** to the decision-maker to reflect on your meeting after you leave. They are also helpful resources for staff to follow up with your "ask" and issues.
- 7. Introduce yourself** to the decision-maker and/or the staff members. Tell them a little bit about yourself and your background. Provide a personal narrative in order to make your message more engaging and memorable. Think about your narrative not as a full biography, but as a short story that illustrates a problem that needs to be solved. Your full introduction and ask should take about 3-5 minutes.
- 8. Make an "ask."** Ask them to do something real and measurable that solves a problem — and that you can hold them accountable for later. Clearly state your position on the issue you came to discuss, and describe how the ask will advance that position.
- 9. Be ready to answer questions** and provide details on the issues that you are discussing. Knowing your issues inside and out gives you credibility and makes it a lot harder for you to be ignored. If you don't know the answer, tell them that — but offer to follow up with an answer.
- 10. Take notes** on what happened during the meeting, the decision-maker's position on the issue, and what you were able to accomplish through the meeting.
- 11.** If the decision-maker disagrees with you, stand up for yourself, but do not become overly argumentative. **Try to share the issue from your personal perspective, emphasize the positives of your position, and keep the conversation on a constructive note.**
- 12. Send a follow-up letter** or email thanking your legislator and/or staff members. Include any information that you might have in support of your issue and your specific ask. The follow-up message is important because it confirms your dedication to your cause and helps build a valuable relationship between you and your decision-maker. It is also great to follow up on any details that were left unanswered during your meeting; this is one of the ways to keep your decision-maker accountable.

**YOU DON'T HAVE  
TO BE PERFECT.  
JUST REMEMBER  
THESE TIPS.**

# Troubleshooting

## WHAT TO DO WHEN...

### **...no one will join you for the meeting.**

Think about how you are approaching friends or educators. Are you giving them enough time to respond and take part? You don't have to have a squad or group of people helping you. You can also do this work on your own. While you are leading this work, you are not alone in this fight. We have your back and are here to support you along the way.

### **...you don't hear back from your decision-maker.**

It sometimes takes two or three tries to get a meeting with a decision-maker, and it can be just as hard to get their attention once you've had your meeting. But don't be discouraged! Remember, contacting them more than one way might help. If you emailed your request, follow up with a phone call, or drop in on their office. Persistence is important!

### **...your decision-maker refuses to meet with you.**

This work is not easy, and sometimes even when we put a lot of work in, we might not meet our goal. Remember to take a deep breath and know that you're doing an amazing job! You can still organize an event to hear the concerns of other students or do a speak out at your school. If you want more help, reach out to GLSEN for guidance.

### **...you can't go to the meeting for accessibility or security reasons.**

See if the meeting can be rescheduled for a different location. Perhaps you can meet at a local library or in a space where you feel safe and affirmed. You may also suggest other potential locations for meeting, or bring a supportive person with you. You should only do what you feel will keep you safe and comfortable through your advocacy work.

### **...there are no problems at your school.**

Are you sure? Some of us do attend schools and live in communities that are affirming to all students. But, chances are there is still room for improvement. You can still ask to schedule a meeting with your principal or city council person to reaffirm why things are good and ways to stay involved and keep youth voices centered in this work.

### **...you win.**

Celebrate! This is a huge deal! Your "win" can be small or huge, so make sure you take time to feel good about your work. Let GLSEN know what you did and how you made it happen. We may even feature you on our blog! At the very least, we want to know what worked and what didn't through your process. Let us know by emailing [students@glsen.org](mailto:students@glsen.org).

# Sample Letter

Dear (Name),

My name is (insert name), and I am a student at (school). I am writing to request a meeting in order to discuss the upcoming GLSEN Day of Silence. The GLSEN Day of Silence is a student-led national event that brings attention to anti-LGBTQ name-calling, bullying, and harassment in schools. Students from middle school to college take a vow of silence in an effort to encourage schools and classmates to address the problem of anti-LGBTQ behavior by illustrating the silencing effect of bullying and harassment on LGBTQ students and those perceived to be LGBTQ.

According to GLSEN's 2015 National School Climate Survey, schools nationwide are a hostile environment for a distressing number of LGBTQ students. This latest edition of GLSEN's biennial National School Climate Survey, which first began in 1999 and remains one of the few studies to examine the middle and high school experiences of LGBTQ youth nationally, found that:

- Nearly 3 out of 4 LGBTQ students (71%) were verbally harassed in the past year because of their sexual orientation and 55 percent because of their gender expression. As a result of feeling unsafe or uncomfortable, 32% missed at least one day of school in the past month.
- LGBTQ students who experience high levels of victimization and discrimination at school have worse educational outcomes. Grade point averages for these students were lower than for those who experienced lower levels of victimization or who did not experience discrimination.
- LGBTQ students in schools with an LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum felt safer. Four out of 10 students in schools with an inclusive curriculum felt unsafe because of their sexual orientation compared to over half of students (63%) in schools without one. Unfortunately, only 19% of LGBTQ students were taught positive representations about LGBTQ people, history or events in school.
- Increases in the availability of many LGBTQ-related school resources, due in part to efforts by GLSEN and other safe-school advocates, may be having a positive effect on the school environment, but more needs to be done. In 2015, LGBTQ students reported a lower incidence of homophobic remarks than ever before – in 2001, over 80% of students reported hearing these remarks regularly compared to about 60% in 2015.

I am requesting a meeting with you in order to discuss ways in which we can make our school(s) safer and more inclusive for LGBTQ students. I believe that meeting face-to-face will allow us to pursue a deeper dialogue to benefit LGBTQ students and our community as a whole.

Sincerely,

(Your name), (Grade in School)

(School Name), (Town)

(Contact information including email and phone number)

For support, contact [students@glSEN.org](mailto:students@glSEN.org).