



COLLABORATING WITH STUDENT ACTIVISTS

INTRODUCTION

Despite great strides in LGBTQ inclusion in recent years at college campuses, nearly one-third of LGBTQ students still [report](#) experiencing bullying, harassment, or assault at college. University resources for LGBTQ students – in particular, transgender students – like all-gender bathrooms, a policy of allowing transgender students to change their gender designation, and gender-inclusive housing were reported to be present at their colleges by less than half of LGBTQ students surveyed.

LGBTQ student activists across the country are working with university leadership to make their colleges and universities better places for LGBTQ students. This resource is designed to support faculty/staff collaboration with student leaders/organizers.

67% of LGBTQ students surveyed by [the Proud & Thriving Project](#) felt lonely or isolated, and 55% expressed feelings of hopelessness, compared to 49% and 35% of non-LGBTQ students, respectively. Supporting student activism can unite the campus community while increasing students' sense of belonging while improving their collegiate experience.

LISTEN

- The LGBTQ community is vast and diverse, with folks who have so many different life experiences. To meet the needs of LGBTQ students, it is essential to look outside your own perspective and listen to the issues that matter to the LGBTQ community at your school.
 - Learn from the collective movements of queer and transgender students of color via [this LGBTQ campus activism primer](#) from the American Association of University Professors.
- From LGBTQ-competency training to designated all-gender restrooms, there are a variety of issues LGBTQ students may approach faculty and leadership about. Understand what student activists are asking for – if you can, work together to establish goals for change.
- Be a safe space where students feel safe to talk to you about changes they want to make on campus.



- HRC has a [guide](#) to establishing and maintaining a safe zone program at your university. Campus Pride also offers [safe space training](#) in-person and online.
- Hold scheduled space for these conversations to happen, i.e. hold scheduled brown bag discussions.
- Keep in mind the students' perspective as people who are on campus only for a limited amount of time – they may have different expectations of progress than faculty or administrators

COMMUNICATE

- If students don't already have a working knowledge of the organization of your university and how policy changes are made, explain the best avenues for students to pursue their goals.
- Make sure students are aware of relevant institutional history and context that might impact the university's response to students' concerns and goals.
- If student activists are planning a protest, walk them through the ways the university may respond so they can make informed decisions about their action.
- Be open about which aspects of the issue students are coming to you with can be addressed and which cannot, and any alternative or longer-term actions that might work.
 - See PEN America's tips for [communicating with student activists](#).

SUPPORT

- If the change students want to make is something you agree needs to be addressed, take this as an opportunity to unite with student activists by lending support and resources.
- Make sure you know your students' rights as LGBTQ students.
 - [LGBTQ+ Student Rights | GLSEN](#)
 - [Transgender Students at Colleges and Universities | Lambda Legal](#)
 - [LGBTQ Youth Rights | Southern Poverty Law Center](#)
- If your position allows, provide opportunities for lawful protest for students who wish to engage in them.
 - If student protests involve civil disobedience, be prepared to respond in a nonviolent, proportionate way. See [PEN America's advice](#) on student protests involving civil disobedience.



- Make sure students are caring for themselves. Activism demands significant time and energy on top of students' other responsibilities, increasing their risk of burnout. This can be especially true for minoritized students, for whom campus change may be a matter of personal survival and therefore take priority over other intellectual and social opportunities.
 - Invite students to talk with you about balancing activism with other commitments. When appropriate, ask students directly if leadership or activist work might be negatively affecting their academic progress.
 - Recognize when student leaders are performing labor that should be a staff responsibility and advocate for staffing changes to address the need.
 - Share resources about how activists can take care of themselves, such as the following:
 - [Activist Self Care](#)
 - [Rest for Resistance](#)
 - [Self-care and prevention of burn out among activists –tools for everyday life](#)