

Launching a Beyond Differences Club

OBJECTIVES	KEY POINTS	MATERIALS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prepare students to start a Beyond Differences club at their own school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Main purpose of the Beyond Differences club is to build community in your school Focus on staff and student buy-in Develop and offer programming that is inclusive and encourages group participation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poster paper Markers Pens

The club is an excellent model for introducing and reinforcing the concept of grassroots organizing. Students must network with both peers and adult advisors in order to develop, publicize and run the organization. This practice builds the club and the presence of the Beyond Differences message within the school, empowers students to operate as leaders, and trains them in the skills necessary to expand the message of social inclusion beyond the club and into their whole school’s social consciousness.

The purpose of today’s session is to develop a Beyond Differences Club. This club is of a social nature and will most often operate during the school lunch hour. We encourage you to engage your student leadership team in the following questions:

THE BEYOND DIFFERENCES CLUB: KEY PRINCIPLES

Intention

- What is the purpose of a Beyond Difference Club?
- What do we hope to achieve throughout the year?
- How we will know we’ve succeeded in our goals?

Communication

- How will the club be perceived by the student community?
- How can we characterize the club as both a fun, joyful place, and a safe, accepting space?
- What are some ways we can publicize the existence of the Beyond Differences Club?

Parental and Faculty/Staff buy-in

- How can we encourage participation from staff, faculty, and parents?
- Who will be our faculty advisor? What do we expect/need from them?

Timing

- Which day of the week should we hold our meetings?
- Are there other school clubs that meet on this day?

Programming

- What kind of activities do we want to plan or provide for the club period?
- What’s the social climate like at the school currently? Can we plan an event or initiative to address it?
- Should we provide incentives for participation? If so, what?
- Is there a way to integrate our programming into the classroom?
- What events have been successful at this school in the past?
- What resources do we have? What do we need to move forward?

Certainly there are many avenues your students can take when answering the questions above. Allow small groups to form if it seems that interests vary from topic to topic. Designate scribes to take notes and be sure to format their responses into a final document that the youth can reference throughout the year. If time allows, begin creating signage for your club!

Notes for Students and Advisors: Launching a Beyond Differences Club

Ending social isolation is a whole community initiative. The movement takes the combined efforts of students, staff, and faculty. The Beyond Differences Club has been developed as the home for this collaboration.

Each school has the prerogative to decide how often to hold meetings, but our recommendation is that whole-school club meetings (meaning that all members of the school are invited to attend) occur twice monthly, and that the leadership team meets in the off weeks to organize events and activities for the rest of the school community.

Club meetings (as opposed to club leadership meetings) have the potential to offer a plethora of activities and options for community engagement. We've found that movies, food-based socials, and presenters often garner the highest levels of attendance.

A faculty or staff advisor to lead the group must first be identified when starting a club at your school. This advisor should compile a list of current or rising 7th and 8th students to serve as the leadership team. This collective group of eight to 20 young people will participate in a leadership conference and training at the start of the year which will prepare them to organize and facilitate the Beyond Differences Club.

Your club leaders will need to give notice in a variety of ways to the school community about joining the club. While social media notifications are always a safe bet, we encourage our leaders to keep it "old school" with paper flyers/posters, PA announcements, and posts in school newspapers (where applicable). Word-of-mouth should also be a regular practice. For the first meeting, most schools offer an incentive—such as candy, popcorn, or stickers—to attend. Getting students in the door is an important first step to getting the club up and running.

Because the purpose of the Beyond Differences Club is to create a space where everyone feels welcome and "No One Eats Alone," it's important to establish group norms that encourage members to socially mix and mingle in accepting and non-clique-like ways. Offer games and activities that allow for middle-schoolers to interact with peers they might not know in a non-threatening setting. Some examples:

- improv games
- social scavenger hunts
- bingo
- team challenges
- board games
- movie trivia

The options are certainly limitless. Some groups simply operate an open room where students can eat lunch. No matter what's on the agenda, the message and purpose of the club must be clear, and the club should be seen by the whole school community as a space that embraces social inclusivity.