

Student Empowerment: Organizing



Intro

This organizing document is designed to serve as a general activism/organizing resource. It is not exhaustive, but will hopefully serve as a first step, as a complementary tool, to be used in winning your campaign.

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Part I: Organizing

Forming a Group:

As students, we have the ability to get our universities to implement, change, or amend policy on our campuses, but we have to organize and build power together. The first step is forming a group of students in order to work collaboratively toward this goal.

Begin by discussing the issue with your friends, colleagues, or professors--essentially with those who you think will be most interested in the issue. In many cases, organizations such as Americans for Informed Democracy (AID) already have affiliate groups, chapters, or interested individuals on your campus or in your community with whom you can collaborate. If no such organization exists, you can begin your own group with your friends and other students who want to organize events around this campaign. Click here to get information about starting an AID chapter.

Starting a group often requires that the chapter or group register with the university—typically by becoming a student-government-recognized group. Contact your student government for help with this process or more information.

As a student-government-recognized group, you can reserve a room on campus and begin to have weekly meetings to coordinate your campaign.

Group Health:

The heart of any campaign is its members: The passion, energy, and dedication that students give to their cause are fundamental to the success of the campaign. These commendable and desirable characteristics, unfortunately, can be undermined by personality conflicts, racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination. Thus, just as important as the issue we are working on, is the way in which students organize themselves. We must not be complacent; we must build, bolster, and maintain our groups' health at all times. A few guiding aphorisms and questions can help you think of ways to make your group dynamic, egalitarian, and above-all, healthy.

Questions:

- Does the whole group make decisions, or just certain individuals? Is there a group hierarchy? How are decisions made: voting (with some form of majority), consensus (all members in agreement), or some other way?
- Do some group members' opinions carry more weight when making decisions? Is this because they have excellent ideas, or because the group is deferring to someone who is of a certain sex, ethnicity, class, or sexual preference?
- Does everyone in the group feel comfortable speaking? Are all group members encouraged to speak, share, and weigh-in when making decisions?
- How are tasks delegated? Do a few people do all of the work? Who does what work? Are tasks based on skills and preferences or by gender, race, or ethnic stereotypes?
- If someone discriminates against another group member, how does the group respond?

Some General Advice:

- Step up if you have not spoken; step back and permit others to speak if you have dominated the conversation.

- Delegate tasks evenly and broadly: Groups can accomplish incredible amounts, but only if all group members are participating. Allow everyone to do both desirable tasks and less-enjoyable work.
- Have a different person facilitate each meeting. The facilitator can keep the meeting moving, encourage everyone to participate, and, if several people want to speak at once, is responsible for keeping track of who is next to speak. By rotating this position, each person in the group can build leadership and communication skills, while simultaneously ensuring that one person does not dominate the discussion.
- Greet new members when they arrive, make them feel as part of the group, and encourage them to get involved with small tasks. This is a way to hook them into the group and enfranchise them.
- HAVE FUN!!! Groups should, hopefully, be friends; meetings should be a space for work as well as jokes, food, and a time to spend learning from other intelligent, passionate students. You are doing great work, and you should enjoy doing it together.

II. Sample Meeting Agenda:

Meetings should, ideally, be short and sweet: plans are made, updates are presented, tasks are delegated, and we can all have a good time and hang out together. Below is a sample agenda that can be used as a guiding example of how to structure the meetings:

- Intros with beginning question (favorite quote, flavor of ice cream, travel plans?)
- Announcements
- Most pressing business to discuss: updates, report backs from previous events or meetings, etc.
- Events to plan—delegation of tasks
- Anything else
- Evaluation: This is a way to make everyone feel comfortable and offer a space for analyzing the meeting: What worked, what should be changed, and any other commendations, concerns, or thoughts.

Objectives:

Now that you have your group and are having meetings, it is time to decide exactly where you are going. Work within the group to decide what it is that you all want implemented or changed.

Overall Campaign Goals:

To develop a strong campaign, it is important to determine your ultimate goal, and then work backwards, determining how events and actions in the immediate and medium-term will build towards your ultimate goal. Below are some examples:

A. Short Term Goals: Today

- To fully learn and understand the new policy and what its implementation at your University requires.
- To establish or organize a group of like-minded students who are interested in the issue.
- To raise awareness through flyers, petitions, letters to the editor in student news paper, radio announcements, class raps, and hand-bills.
- To organize campaign kick-off event.

B. Long Term Goals: Tomorrow

- To generate vast student, faculty, and community support.
- To pass a Student Government Resolution in favor of adopting the policy change.
- To build a diverse coalition of student groups, community groups, faculty, staff, alumni, religious organizations, and other influential groups to advocate to the decision-maker on this issue.

C. Ultimate goal: The Future

- To have our University implement or change policy.

In order to reach this goal, to achieve what we aspire to see in the future, we need to set short and long term goals that will lift and lead us to this ultimate goal. The short term goals should lead to the long term objectives and should subsequently move our universities to change or implement policy.

Targets:

Now that you have set out your objectives, the next step is to identify who is ultimately responsible for implementing policy. That is, who is the target of your efforts? You can tailor your events and actions to these targets. For example, you may want to organize a large rally of support for your campaign in order to generate energy and enthusiasm among the student body, rather than pressure the primary target.

A. Primary:

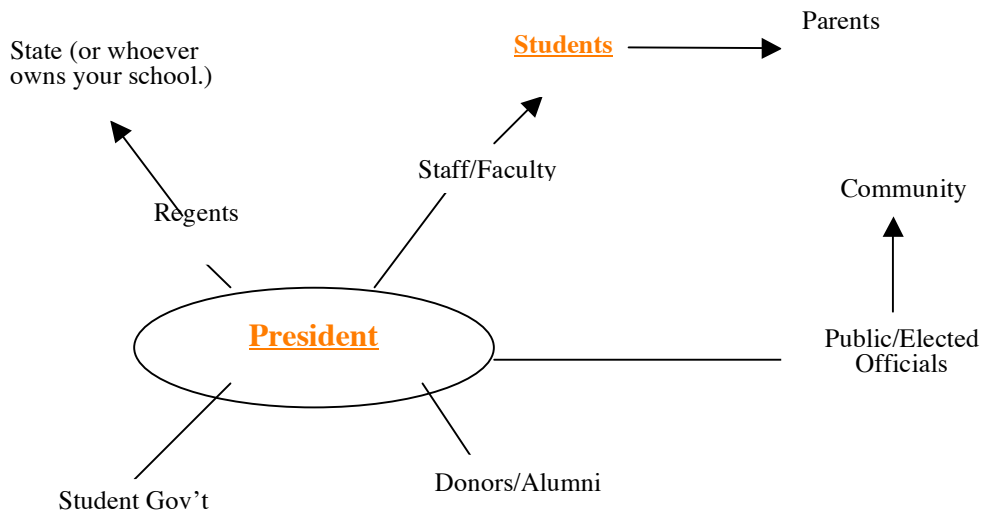
Who are the decision makers that are ultimately responsible for implementing the policy?
Typically, this means the University Administration or Board of Trustees.

B. Secondary:

Who holds influence on the primary target: alumni, prominent donors, pre-eminent faculty, community luminaries, and students?

C. Tertiary:

All other forms of influence and important opinions: student body, faculty, staff, community and religious organizations. Often, you will principally concentrate on building coalitions with these groups in order to influence your primary target. One of the most effective ways to figure this out is to create a power map. This map centers around the person or group of people who are most responsible for implementing change on your campus. Most often, this individual is the President of your school. Here is an example of what your power map may look like:



Resources, Allies, and \$:

A. Student Groups

There are a myriad of sympathetic student groups on campus that will support your campaign. It is important to reach out to them, to ask for their support, and to reciprocate by attending their events and/or endorsing their campaigns. Initially, do not ask too much of other groups until you have established a foundational relationship. Attend their meetings and events, build relationships with their members, invite them to your meetings to present their group, and hang out together. Much of this type of coalition building is informal; it is about building and deepening relationships—both personal and working ones.

Once you feel these relationships are sufficiently developed and strong, you can ask them to cosponsor an event (see events section for more on this) or sign on to a letter that formally proclaims their group's support for your campaign. This type of sign-on letter—an explicit and public endorsement of your campaign by other student groups demonstrates to your primary target that you are not a parochial, isolated, or small group of students, but rather, a coalition and a movement. It carries great weight.

Potential allies include: Amnesty International, and Public Interest Research Group (PIRG), Student Global AIDS Campaign (SGAC), American Medical Student Association (AMSA), The Global AIDS Alliance, and Greek life groups.

B. Community and Religious Organizations

These can be approached in much the same way as student groups. Often students in your group are already members of these groups, and can address these organizations and ask for their support. These organizations are often more amenable to writing individual letters on behalf of their organization to the primary target rather than sign onto a form letter. This method is persuasive and effective as well.

These organizations often can provide financial support and are willing to cosponsor events with student organizations. Take advantage of their resources, contacts, advice, and support!

C. Student Government

Student governments can be a boon to any campaign. Beyond having funds that students can access to underwrite a campaign, their resolutions are powerfully symbolic and have far-reaching effects. Discuss your campaign with interested student government representatives to take the pulse of the student government. Are they interested in introducing, sponsoring, or supporting a resolution exhorting your university to adopt the policy? Do not, however, try to push through a resolution that will not pass; it will be detrimental to your campaign. If it is possible, pass the resolution, but also take advantage of the resources, influence, and contacts of your student government.

Student governments usually grant money to student groups in the form of an operating budget. They also, usually, have a special allocation request process, which is simply a mechanism for obtaining funds to put on an event—for example, to cover the costs of renting a room, sound equipment, or other materials.

D. Faculty and Staff Governments

Often faculty and staff have representative associations, such as a senate. These bodies can be approached and utilized in the same way as the student government: Establish contact with a supportive representative, discuss the issue, and how the representative body can support your campaign. Also, academic departments often have funds available to help finance speaking events. Finally, at schools where the faculty and staff are unionized, you can ask these associations to endorse your campaign.

E. Americans for Informed Democracy (AID): Network and \$

AID has a vast network of students with whom you can collaborate. These students often have insights and experience with organizing events—what worked, what was unsuccessful, and a ton of other info.

In addition to that invaluable resource, AID has something more quantifiable: mini grants. You can apply for a mini grant for your event by [clicking here](#). Although not massive, these mini-grants will give you the financial means to buy the materials that will get you going, or augment and enhance your campaign.

Messaging:

The success of your campaign is inextricably linked to how it is perceived by your targets. To this end, the adjectives, phrases, and message that you use to project, frame, and present your campaign are intrinsic to achieving your ultimate goal. Articulate, reasoned, and polite yet insistent arguments are paramount. When the student paper, student body, and greater community begin to discuss your campaign, the way in which the issue was initially framed will influence whether these different groups are sympathetic or antagonistic to the campaign.

Begin by evaluating your audience—that is, the main target you are addressing. Speaking with administrators requires a different approach than with your friends and overall student body (see section entitled “How to Approach your Administration” below for more guidance). For students, it is imperative to highlight the fact that the policies at our University—policies ostensibly implemented in our names as students, faculty, administrators—have significant ramifications on the lives of millions of men, women, and children around the world. Students have this ability, this responsibility, and this power.

Furthermore, as institutions of higher education, universities often have mission statements that pay homage to grandiose, cosmopolitan, humanistic, and noble goals. Incorporating these missions into why your University should implement the new policy is both powerful and persuasive. Administrators can be convinced by arguing that your university can and should be a leader in the fight to enhance global health—that it can be a national and international leader in this arena. Not only will implementing the policies enhance the prestige of the university, it is a brilliant and cost-effective publicity decision.

Some reference questions to help think about your message are:

- What exactly do we want—one sentence i.e. what is your ultimate goal?
- Why is this important (for students, the university, and other community groups)?

Perhaps the best rudimentary guide for framing your campaign is to follow the language used in the introductory section of this toolkit. Every handbill, banner, press release, and speech should have a consistent, coherent message—tied together by a unifying theme that is reinforced through your messaging. Thus, messaging should be included in every planning session as part of a large campaign strategy.

Education and Events/Actions:

You now have your objectives, you have identified the various parties that you need on your side to reach the ultimate goal, and you know how to frame your campaign. Now it is time to plan how you will influence those targets. The supporting pillars of every campaign are education, action, and political negotiations. The first two are addressed in the proceeding section, with political negotiations falling under the rubric entitled “Talking to Your Administration.”

Events and actions serve two purposes: education and advocacy. In order to get grassroots support among the student body, faculty, staff, and community, it is imperative to do huge education campaigns. People will be more supportive of your cause if they understand it: How it will help others, why it is pertinent to them, and what exactly the campaign hopes to achieve (i.e. the message). Educational events and actions can help recruit members, gain publicity, advance your cause, and pressure your targets to implement the policy.

The guiding acronym for your actions should be

Specific
Achievable
Measurable

Keep all actions specific, achievable, and measurable. If you plan to have a rally, for example, work toward turning out a certain number of students—a realistic amount that will still show sufficient support for implementing your policy. Partner with other student groups to put on events. Also contact [Americans](#)

[for Informed Democracy](#) or sarah@aidemocracy.org for information on potential speakers, ideas or other advice.

Most importantly, make sure that prospective actions build upon previous actions. That is, you want to aspire to organize a steadily escalating series of events—from awareness-building events, to rallies, and then, if necessary, to more direct actions. For example, a speaking event that is attend by 50 people could then be followed by a rally of support that turns out 75 people—visible and growing forms of support among students, faculty, staff, and community members can instigate and move others to take action on your behalf.. For this it can be helpful to use the Midwest Organizing Model, which puts the different activities that your group will do into three categories along a spectrum: Awareness and Education, Mobilization, and Direct Action. It is very important that you lay out a time line for when each one of these stages will occur. A potential timeline of escalation is provided on the next page.

Awareness/Education

- Film screening
- Conferences (AID)
- Petitions
- Passing a resolution with SGA

Mobilization

- Meet with Admin
- Bird-dogging
- Rally
- Set a deadline

Direct Action/Winning

- Sit-in/dance-in/die-in
- Non-violent rallies
- Get closer to the decision maker w/ your rallies (President's office, etc.)
- Create a (non-violent!) disturbance

AID can provide you a guide for [video conferences](#), [speaking events](#), [film screenings](#), [mini-conferences](#), [rallies](#), and other more targeted actions. We also have [mini-grants](#) available for all of these activities. Contact [Americans for Informed Democracy](#) or sarah@aidemocracy.org.

Publicity:

A. Flyering and Handbills:

Events and actions do not have to be large or grandiose to be effective and constructive.

Indeed, distributing hand-bills to students or posting provocative flyers around campus can

advance your campaign immensely; this builds awareness, as well as serves a recruitment purpose. Including your group name, the time and place you meet, and a clear, powerful, cogent message will entice students to come to your meetings, and thus, get involved with your campaign. Flyering several prominent places—such as the entrance doors to popular buildings, the student center, dining halls, bathroom stalls or the cafeteria—once a week is a way to generate an ongoing buzz and publicity for when you do a bigger event. Flyering in areas that are prominent and obvious i.e. not bulletin boards. See the Appendix for sample flyers.

B. Letters to the Editor:

These will increase the legitimacy and publicity of your event. It is a great way for new group members to educate themselves about the issue and get involved with the campaign in a small, but important, way.

C. Petitions/Canvassing:

Getting signatures on [petitions](#) or collecting student's contact info by talking to them around campus is imperative to running a successful campaign. It serves the same function as flyers and handbills, and it is a fun way to mosey around campus on a nice day with a clipboard and meet new people. Petitions will not win your campaign; they will, however, provide you with contact info to send action alerts, recruit new members, and build a foundation of student support.

D. Class Raps:

Thirty seconds in front of your class to explain the issue, what you are hoping to achieve, and where/when you meet is a great way to get others involved—especially in classes where the theme is obliquely related to your campaign. If politely approached, professors almost always allow students to make brief announcements about the group and upcoming events, and often end of supporting your campaign as well. Also, ask your professors if any of their colleagues may be interested in supporting you, or letting you speak in front of their class.

E. Student Newspaper:

Talking to student reporters who are your friends (or even local papers) is a great way to generate publicity. Reporters will often be enticed by large events. [See a sample press release and contact advice.](#)

F. Banner:

Student groups are often allowed to hang large banners in their student center in order to advertise events. This is a great tool to publicize your first meeting—a “kick-off” meeting—and also any other large events you are planning. Finally, if you decide to set a deadline for your administration to adopt the policies your group is proposing, banners are perhaps the best way to raise awareness of the deadline among the student body.

G. Tabling:

You can reserve tables in the student center and dining halls in order to advertise your campaign. A few times each week, during high traffic times, is a great way to raise awareness and get people interested in the issue—motivating them to come to your meetings. Have petitions, hand bills, and even a poster (tri-fold) with pictures and background info at the table. Something bright and colorful grabs attention, especially when coupled with a

provocative sign that piques interest: “How INSERT UNIVERSITY NAME can help stop AIDS, Malaria, and Tuberculosis!!!”

H. Submit a press releases 1 week and again 2 days before the event:

Click here for a sample press release templates <http://www.aidemocracy.org/toolkit_templates.html#press>. A great resource for finding press office fax numbers (and the tool that we use) is Newspapers Online <<http://www.newspapersol.com/index.html>> . Then call to remind the press outlet of your event the days before.

I. Put your event in the calendar of events. Find your newspaper contact at Newspapers Online <<http://www.newspapersol.com/index.html>> . Since community calendars fill up quickly it is vital that you put your event in early. When corresponding via email be sure to put “Event for community Calendar-INSERT DATE” in the headline. Once you have attained contact information and have spoken to someone be sure to follow up with an email or phone confirmation especially 2 days before your event and the day of.

G. Talk to your friends!!!

The best way to get people to turn out for events and meetings is to draw upon your friends. If each person in the group commits to calling 3 friends a week before an event, and then makes two follow up phone calls, this is the surest way to get a large turnout.

Contacting and Talking to your Administration:

While in the midst of your campaign, it is important to maintain contact and hold negotiations with your primary decision makers. Although putting on rallies is fun and rewarding, the political work with the administration is equally important. The section on the timeline details an approximate schedule for beginning to approach them.

In terms of how to approach your administration—primarily the President, Chancellor, or Vice-President/Chancellor—the key is to work through their secretaries. These men and women (some of whom are your fellow students) are the interlocutors between the decision-makers and your group. They can be thought of as secondary targets. They have the power to permit you access to the administration by scheduling meetings and forums with the typically busy administration; or, conversely, they can leave you wallowing and contact-less for months at a time. The simplest way to get a meeting is to ask the secretary to schedule a specific meeting with your decision maker. Also, many Presidents hold open office hours that can be utilized as well.

Perhaps the best guiding aphorism for approaching your administration is: Be prepared, be polite, and be insistent. Do not doubt your cause, your knowledge, or your dedication. Always ask why: Why do they feel concerned about implementing this policy? Why is that question pertinent to your discussion? Offering to do extra research and write informative memos for the administration to answer their specific questions can be constructive and expedient, but be wary of the fact that this task is often little more than a stalling technique—employed as a way to sidetrack, delay, or undercut your efforts. The modus operandi of many administrations is waiting—purposefully stalling or delaying to make a decision in the hope that leaders in the your group with graduate, summer break will come, or that students will eventually lose motivation or interest in the campaign. Be highly cognizant of this tactic, and do not hesitate to insist that they make a decision by establishing concrete timelines or deadlines for meetings and decisions.

A way to preempt these types of stalling tactics—narrowly disguised as informational inquiries—is to send a background and briefing proposal to the administration before the first meeting. Much of the info that you can put in this memo is contained in the introduction to this toolkit or by contact sarah@aidemocracy.org. Deliver this report when you set up the first meeting, and then refer to it in your introductory remarks during the first meeting. If they have read the report, the meeting will provide you with an opportunity to take their pulse and see if they are generally receptive to the idea of adopting the Philadelphia Consensus Statement; if they have not read the memo, that indicates that you may have much more political and advocacy work to do.

Subsequent meetings should all be centered on concrete steps, such as: When are they going to make a decision? What else needs to be done in order to help them adopt the policy? Setting timelines and deadlines is effective for this purpose.

Time Frame, or, How to reach the Objectives: Putting it all together

A possible schedule of organizing is provided below; it is not exhaustive or the only strategy, but it has worked before for other schools. You can use the accompanying worksheet to plan your campaign in your group. This matrix is a reference for actions on how to achieve your short-term, long-term, and ultimate goals. Have fun, go out and learn, and win.

Phase 1: Recruitment/Education

•Weeks 1-3

- Introduce your friends and fellow students to the issue—explaining its importance and pertinence.
- Form a student-government recognized group, and establish weekly meeting times and places to plan your campaign.
- Canvassing on campus with petitions, tabling 2X/week, flyering on doors once a week, deliver flyers to dorms to be posted, class raps, and banner in student union.
- Plan rough outlines of the entire semester—week by week—with as much group participation as possible (this schedule can and will change, but it is an important first step toward getting organized). Establish specific, achievable, measurable tasks that are equally shared among group members.
- Make initial contact with decision makers.
- Make initial contact with potential allies.
- Touch base with allies in student government; initiate process to get resolution passed in favor of your campaign.
- Begin with letters to the editor.

•Weeks 3-10

- Continue to flyer and table and class rap and do petitions.
- Begin to build relationship with press.
- Nail down meeting times with admin, take their “pulse.”
- Begin speaking with friends, allies, and faculty in earnest. This is fundamental to building a strong foundation—an informed student body will be less fickle and more supportive than an ignorant or misinformed one.
- Go to faculty and staff senates, and other associated councils or task forces in order to get resolutions passed in favor of campaign.

- Work with student government in whatever capacity is necessary.
- Plan and carry out 1-2 events: Something fun, educational, and that gets wide press. Click here for ideas and how we can support you.
- End with something that is hugely successful in terms of education and bolstering community/campus support: speaking event, concerts, mini conference, street theater in your campuses main area. Contact sarah@aidemocracy.org for fun, innovative events.

Phase 2: Mobilization

- Set deadline for the administration to make decision.
- Make student body aware of decision with letters to editor, flyers, and banners.
- Inform the press of the deadline.
- Keep talking to more and more allies, professors, and students.
- If (or when) the administration misses the deadline, respond rapidly with a big, public event, such as a rally.
- Keep meeting with the administration as you begin to escalate with other actions.
- Contact regents/legislators and/or other prominent luminaries and get them to intervene and advocate on your behalf.

Phase 3: Winning

It is possible that your administration may continue to be intractable and unreceptive to your requests after phases 1 and 2. Thus, to win your campaign you may need to employ more targeted, direct actions. This is the escalatory phase, when it is imperative to bring pressure to bear upon your main targets in order to win your campaign. Contact sarah@aidemocracy.org for advice and ideas about a number of powerful, effective, and entertaining steps that your group can take at this phase in order to win your campaign.

Campaign Strategy Chart

Goals	Who Makes the Decision?	Potential Allies	Potential Opponents	Unknowns	Needs: Research and Material	Acti
Ultimate Long-Term Short-Term	Primary Target Secondary Target Tertiary Target	1. List Student Groups 2. Faculty Members 3. Staff Members 4. Student Government 5. Community Organizations 6. Alumni	List potential spoilers			

		7. Religious Organizations				
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Part II: Concrete Events to Launch, Strengthen, and Win your Campaign.

AID offers specific organizer’s toolkits and mini-grants for the following events that you can use as guiding steps to build your campaign to **INSERT GOAL**.

- [Film Screenings](#): AID has a plethora of provocative films and documentaries that you can screen at your campus. This is a great first event to kick-off your campaign—setting the educational and awareness foundation for you campaign.
- [Mini-conference](#): Draw upon AID’s network of pre-eminent speakers to come to your campus and speak on a topic pertinent to *INSERT CAMPAIGN GOAL*.
- [International Videoconference](#): Link to other students nationally and internationally to discuss your campaign, interact with these students, learn, and apply what you have learned back to your campaign.
- [Rallies](#): Plan an exuberant, overwhelming display of support for your campaign to raise further awareness and pressure your administration to *INSERT CAMPAIGN GOAL*.