

## **College Organizing**

Jazmin Kay

College students have always been at the center of it all, inspiring and leading countless movements. From the civil rights movement, anti-war protests, Black Live Matter, to sexual assault prevention—college students have historically, played a pivotal role organizing on their campuses and bringing awareness and spurring political and social action.

When first arriving at college, it can be scary. From new people, environment changes, classes, there is often so much going on. One of the best ways to find your place on campus is finding your movement. Being surrounded by people who are passionate about a cause is a great way to build not only friendships, but to create lasting change on campus and beyond.

Be at the frontlines of change. As the 2018 midterms approach, here are some ways you can be a part of organizing on your campus community and help in electing candidates that reflect the values and issues that matter to you.

Regardless of major, school, or background—there is a place for you in campus organizing.

### **Student organizations**

Join an existing student organization

Student organizations are great vehicles for political organizing. With over 100,000 student members and 623 chapters and growing, organizations such as College Democrats of America are great place to start. You can find your campus chapter here. Organizations such as Our Revolution Campus, Young Democratic Socialists of America, are other examples of active political organizations on college campuses you can join.

Most organizations will hold meetings throughout the semester. Attend a meeting, reach out on social media, send an email, text a friend who is involved—there are countless ways to deepen your engagement with student organizations. Consider also running for a leadership position if you are interested as well.

These groups are often hubs for organizing activities such as phone-banking, canvassing and campaign trips, voter registration drives, volunteer opportunities and more.

There are also non-party affiliated organizations on campus that range from everything from the Feminist Student Union, Black Student Union, environmental groups and more which engage in political organizing. While many of these range based on campus, check with your Center for Student Engagement or activities (or whatever is the equivalent for your campus)

to and ask for a list of registered student organizations. Your RA, professors, and friends can also be wonderful resources for helping find out more information about finding an aligned student organizations as well!

### **Create a student organization**

Don't see the organization you are interested in on your campus or have an innovative idea for a new political, advocacy, or policy-oriented organization? Create your own!

While you may be able to organize on public campuses without going through the process of making your group an official club, there are a number of benefits to becoming a club, such as:

Resources - some clubs receive a stipend or printing privileges.

Facilities - clubs are often given priority in booking rooms and equipment, and rarely have to pay booking fees that apply to individuals or outside groups for the privilege.

Legitimacy - it is easier for clubs to clear activities - such as tabling or flyering - with campus security than it is for individual students to do so. Activities which might not be allowed on private campuses may be permitted if you are part of the school structure.

Publicity - official clubs get web and print presence on campus, and are often invited to participate in large-scale events.

Longevity - any social or activist group you form while at school is likely to dissipate after you graduate. By creating a club, you leave the structure in place by which future students can get involved with the work you began.

While the steps to become a recognized student organization with your university do vary on campus. Here are some common first steps you should take:

Find an advisor:

An advisor is a member of the academic faculty who will help to facilitate the smooth running of your group on campus. Most schools require that you have at least one advisor for your group before forming a club. As a member of the faculty, the advisor will be more familiar with the resources and facilities you may have at your disposal.

It is particularly useful if your advisor is someone who teaches in fields relating to your club's focus, such as political science, communication, health science, labor law or public policy: Your club officers may even be able to earn academic credit for time spent on public education, voter registration, or social advocacy.

Create an Executive Board Structure that works for your group

When creating a campus organizing committee, it is important to assign campus specific leadership roles. Take the following as an example of a campus specific structure:

**Chair/President:** Oversees the organizing committee and group as a whole. This person should serve as the external communicator for the group, conducting all external communications (ex. they're the person who talks to the administration, speaks for the group, etc).

**Vice Chair/Vice President:** This person should preside over organizing committee meetings as well as set the agenda, and make sure all internal goals are in check. They also would step into the role of Chair in case anything happened.

**Financial Officer:** This person will work with the chair and school administration to secure and allocate funding for this group on campus, through creation of a bank account or some other method of storing funds for use. This person will be responsible for providing reimbursement of club funds if a member of the organizing committee uses their own personal funds for club expenses.

**Communications Officer:** This person oversees all the communications operations, including social media, digital or web assets, and press operations.

**Membership/Outreach Officer:** This person reaches out to other organizations and individuals to join the group. Person who leads and organizing outreach to organization and individuals to lead the group. Their goal is to make your group as inclusive, diverse, and welcoming for all as possible.

Visibility and getting your message out

Whether you are starting your own organization or joining an existing one, it is important you make sure your club is as visible and accessible as possible. Here are some ways to do that:

### **Tabling**

Tabling in high-populated parts of campus is a great way to help promote your club. It is important, when tabling, to prepare your table well, and to use proper tabling etiquette. Often times, you will need to table for your group. This tabling is usually done at club fairs, campus admitted students weekend, and more. When you begin setting up your table, you should have a couple things present. In addition to having any materials and resources for your club, you should also create a sign-up sheet for interested students to get on your mailing list.

When you create your sign-up sheet, you can use one of two options. You can either put a laptop on your table and create a google form for people to sign up. These people can sign up by filling out the form.

You can also manually print out sign-up sheets and place those on your table. You can create columns for the following fields and add any others which you think would be helpful:

Name  
Email  
Phone

After the tabling session, you can transfer this information into a google sheet or excel form, and use to send blast emails.

Get involved in the 2018-midterm elections.

The November 6th general election will decide who controls the House and the Senate. According to the New York Times, there are at least six toss-up seats in the Senate and at least 26 in the House, with many more races leaning one way or the other but still not solidly locked down. Democrats only need to flip two seats in the Senate and 24 in the House in order to regain majority control.

Phone bank for your candidates. Phone banking and reaching out to eligible voters by phone can make issues more personal and outreach more efficient. Oftentimes, phone calls need not last longer than three minutes. Setting up a phone bank can be as simple as gathering four or five of your friends and sitting down for an hour to call voters. You can even start a phone-banking club at your school to make it a regular event. Callhub has extremely practical resources online to help you streamline and organize the phone banking process.

If you want to set up something bigger, you can call folks who are dedicated to your candidate and ask them to volunteer for your phone bank. Write out a script tailored to the list of callers you're talking to, including conditionals ('If they say ..., say ...'). Make sure to hold training sessions to make sure all volunteers are on the same page. On the day of the phone bank, try to keep it upbeat. Provide snacks and water if you can, and maybe even make a game out of it.

Canvassing has also proven to be extremely effective. It is, however, more costly and will require a greater deal of organization. You'll have to consider start-up costs, plotting out routes, obtaining a voter registration list, hiring or appointing coordinators, technology, and campaign gear. It usually makes sense to phone bank prior to canvassing in order to get a better sense of who you should target. If the goal of your canvassing is to get people out to the polls, then focus on those who have promised you the vote. If your goal is to sway people, then target those who showed indecision. If you do choose to start a club that canvasses after school, you could streamline the fundraising and organizing processes, which could make the actual canvassing run a lot more smoothly.

Finally, volunteer for and donate to campaigns near you and if you can, and encourage others around you to do the same. Make information regarding opportunities in your community readily available in your schools. You can have the information published in your school's student publication or in the morning announcements. Talk to your school about having bake sales or other fundraising events in order to both raise money for donations and to raise more awareness.

When you are tabling, be sure to be positive and engaging with potential club members. Be sure to speak about your club's mission, what members will be doing in the club, and let them know the date of your next meeting (if you have one).

### **Social media**

Being active on social media is an important platform to be able to make sure your message is out there and is meeting students where they are at. One of the first things you should make sure your student organization has is appropriate social handles saved.

While it is totally up to your group to determine the social media platforms they think will be the most effective, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter tend to be the most active platforms for political organizing. Additionally, as Facebook shifts away from pages, creating a Facebook Group for your members can be a great way to spread the word about upcoming events or initiatives. Tools such as Facebook and Instagram live are also highly effective and tend to perform well and should be considered if you have any events with speakers or wanted to go live from organizing actions such as protests. When you have an event or something you want to gain exposure, you can also consider purchasing a Snapchat Filter to increase visibility.

When you are posting on a social media platform, the body of what you post is often referred to as "content." Content can consist of memes, digital flyers promoting your club's events on campus, pictures of your group, or even videos. Whatever your content is, content should be relevant, appealing, effective and positive.

**Relevant:** the content that you post on a social media account should be in line with the work your group is doing, and the work you guys want to do. With the upcoming midterm elections, it is helpful to make sure you are posting about any relevant news events and information as well as things such as voter registration deadlines.

**Appealing:** For social media content, many times, you can create your own. A good resource is [www.canva.com](http://www.canva.com) to create graphics and digital flyers. When you are creating digital materials, you should be careful to do the following:

Don't overload on information. Keep the information to a minimum.

**Effective:** The goal of social media organizing, at the end of the day, is to convey information about the on-the-ground organizing your student group is doing.

**Positive:** Keep your content on the positive side! At the end of the day, you should be promoting the work you are doing and what's important to you, not attacking other people

**DON'T FEED THE TROLLS:** When making posts on social media, people may comment provocative things. You should not give any ammunition to these people, and ignore/hide the comments so as to maintain the integrity of your group.

Make sure your branding is consistent. Try and develop a style guide for the colors and fonts you would like your group to use in addition to the social branding of hashtags and other key words.

You can find more tips about effective social media in the Introduction to Digital Organizing section.

## **Time Management**

A lot of times, campus activism can feel overwhelming and make you feel as though you have to sacrifice other things such as your grades, sleep, or mental health in order to be a successful campus activist. However, campus activism does not and should not be that way. Make sure you are always checking in with yourself and making time for necessary self care. Here are some time management tips that can help alleviate some stress:

### Develop and game plan

At the beginning of the semester, you can create a game plan. A list of goals, campaigns, or other things you want to accomplish in the upcoming semester. The game plan isn't a week one or week two plan, but a plan for the whole semester. Your game plan should take everything into account.

**Timing:** When are midterms? finals? When will people not be on campus?

**Infrastructure:** What does your group have the capacity to do? What can your membership handle?

**Responsibility:** Who is the core of your group? Can they be held accountable to make sure you accomplish your plan?

When you create a game plan, you should designate one person to make sure you are on track to accomplish it. This way the goals can get solidly implemented as the semester goes on, so your group can build power on campus.

### Coalition Building

In order to create successful events on your campus, you often need to coalition build with other student organizations and groups on campus. To do this, you can take the following steps.

### Attend other groups meetings

The best way to get involved with another student group is to attend their meetings and show support for their event. This way, the group will feel comfortable working with you. You might also volunteer at their events, and help foster the activist community on campus.

## **Co-organizing an event**

Partnering with other organizations to do joint events and actions is a fantastic way to build relationships to achieve common goals. It is important if you are planning an event with another group, to make their voices feel heard, and take their concerns into consideration.

## **Outreach on campus**

It is important to be inclusive in your campus group so you can support different communities on campus.

Inclusivity in your meetings

You may want to consider the following as you host meetings that are supportive of multiple groups on campus.

**Progressive Stack:** When people raise their hand to speak in a meeting prioritize people from marginalized groups to speak first.

**Inclusive Check-ins:** When you have check in at the beginning of your meeting, try to ask questions that make people feel comfortable, and feel ready to express themselves in a group. Maybe not, "How is your studying?" but rather, "If you could be a part of any activist movement past or present, which one would you be a part of?"

**Diversity in Leadership:** You should aim to have people from different backgrounds and who have different perspectives on your leadership. This way your group can create events and tailor messages to fit many different groups on your campus.

## **Organizing Outside of Student Groups**

While student organizations are often the most common way to spearhead advocacy on your campus, there are ways to be and advocate on campus outside of groups.

Get involved in the surrounding community

Understanding the surrounding community your college resides is an important way to bring your advocacy beyond your campus. Whether it is the town you grew up in, or a new city; researching the neighboring community and finding local political and activists groups is a great way to expand your advocacy and reach the broader community. Often times, many local groups are also looking for collegiate representation and input. For more on community based organizing, see the sections on rural, suburban, and urban organizing.

Your voice is powerful. Use it.

College is an incredible opportunity to be able to learn and explore political organizing. Utilize your time on campus to find other like-minded activist communities and always remember how valuable your voice is.

From writing an op-ed on your campus newspaper, listening and providing your perspective in the classroom, to talking to your friends in the dining hall over dinner— your voice is important and deserves to be heard. Stand up, speak up, and let's start a movement.

# Music to Get You Organized

Angelo Hernandez-Si

These songs are singles from a larger project I've been working toward, *Bad Hambre*, a collection of anti-love songs that problematizes desire in light of Trump's notion of the "bad hombre." Here they are:

"Dulcinea"

"Welcome to the Hamptons"

"Sidenote"