

STARTING A LOCAL CHAPTER



**HOW TO LAUNCH SCHOOL &
COMMUNITY-BASED CHAPTERS**

VERSION 4.0



HIGH SCHOOL DEMOCRATS *of* AMERICA
— FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY —

GETTING STARTED

Local chapters, located within individual high schools and communities across the country, make up the pulse of HSDA as a whole. Members on the local level work on campaigns, hold fundraisers, and even run for office themselves in order to improve their communities and turn their states blue.

THE PROCESS

In order to have a High School Democrats chapter or club at your high school or in your community, you must first complete a simple process that will ensure success for your organization. First, you must determine the type of chapter you wish to create, i.e. a *school based chapter* or a *community based chapter*. Look at Option 1 to start a chapter in your school, otherwise, look at Option 2 to start a chapter in your community.

Option 1: Start a school-based chapter. You'll need a teacher or administrator to serve as an adviser, a mission statement and/or bylaws, and as many interested students as possible.

- **Step 1:** Find other students interested in starting a local chapter. We strongly recommend at least 3.
- **Step 2:** Find a teacher or administrator who will serve as your adviser. Discuss your ideas/plans with them.
- **Step 3:** Talk to your administrators and/or principals. Have either yourself or your adviser ensure that your chapter follows your schools rules on clubs and extra-curricular activities.
- **Step 4:** Hold your first meeting. A good time is before or after school, or even during lunch! Remember that you will need to hold Officer Elections at one of your first meetings.
- **Step 5:** Register your chapter online by visiting our website hsdems.org and going to the "Action" section; make sure your members fill out the digital membership form as well. We'll put you in touch with your state organization.

Option 2: Start a community-based chapter. This option is more likely to be used in the event that you fail to secure administrative approval for a school-based chapter, or are located in an area with a lower number of interested individuals.

- **Step 1:** Find other students interested in starting a local chapter. We strongly recommend at least 3.
- **Step 2:** Find a community member who will serve as your adviser. Discuss your ideas/plans with them.
- **Step 3:** Choose a location to have weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly meetings with the help of your adviser. Coffee shops, book stores, parks, and homes work well; remember that all locations should be handicap accessible and prepare for the needs of your members.
- **Step 4:** Hold your first meeting. We recommend meetings to take place on afternoons or during the weekend. Remember that you will need to hold Officer Elections at one of your first meetings.
- **Step 5:** Register your chapter online by visiting our website hsdems.org and going to the "Action" section; make sure your members fill out the digital membership form as well. We'll put you in touch with your state organization.

PROBLEMS

Club approval processes differ by school, so you may run into problems with your school administration. If you need assistance, don't hesitate to reach out to your state chair (the information is located on our website) or national leadership. A copy of the **Equal Access Act (Section 4071)** is located on page 4 of this guide.

ESTABLISHING A CHAPTER

YOUR FIRST MEETING

Your first meeting is by far the most important, as you will be giving your members and the rest of your school a first impression of your Local Chapter. The first meeting should be very upbeat, positive, organized, and most of all, fun. It is important that everyone feels included and welcome, and that they each find some importance in being involved. Below are some basic tips and suggestions for your first meeting.

Your First Meeting: Tips and suggestions.

- **Start the meeting on time.** This lets your members know that you are serious about the club, and expect to be productive and efficient in your search for your goals.
- **Try collecting contact information from your members.** This is to get your new members contact information, and to be able to contact them about future meetings. We have provided in the Appendix of this manual a sample collection sheet.
- **Welcome your membership and guests.** Don't forget that your members need to feel appreciated and wanted!
- **Introductions.** After you have announced yourself and one thing about you, have each student in the room do the same. Ask anyone in the room to share their experiences (positive or negative) with politics.
- **Explanation.** Your members need to find reason to join! Make sure to explain both what our organization is, but also why they should be a part of it!
- **Plans.** Make sure to give your group a rough summary of what you will be doing throughout the year; national conferences, national conventions, helping with campaigns, going on trips, etc.
- **Nominations.** Explain what nominations are for and when you will be voting. Be sure to explain election procedures and the job descriptions of the various offices.
- **Prepare for the next meeting.** Remember that you will need to be able to inform your members about the next meeting i.e. the date, location, etc. You will also likely need to use the contact information you collected.

CONNECTING WITH THE ORGANIZATION

Your respective state organization and our national structure are relatively decentralized. As a local chapter leader, you will have both a lot of freedom and a lot of responsibility. However, there are certainly going to be times where you need to communicate with other members of the organization, and it will surely be beneficial to both you and your chapter if you maintain a strong level of communication. We recommend the following tips and suggestions to ensure that you make the most of the resources HSDA has to offer.

Establishing Communication: Tips and suggestions.

- **Get in touch with the national organization.** Go to our website (hsdems.org) and click on the "Action" section, where you will find forms to register your chapters and members; this allows us to effectively deliver updates and resources to you.
- **Connect with your state chair.** Again, you can find the contact information for our state chairs at hsdems.org.
- **Encourage attendance at State and National Conferences/Conventions.** Going to a conference or convention can be a very exciting experience. Whether or not you or your members plan on making a career in politics, does not affect the benefit of meeting other individuals like yourselves from around the nation.
- **Connect with other Chapter Leaders.** Don't forget the fact that there are hundreds of others students from across the nation leading local high school chapters. Every state has a Facebook and/or Twitter account.
- **Be Respectful!** Don't forget that our organization tries to maintain a very professional standing. As a local leader, you carry the responsibility of representing both HSDA and the Democratic Party as a whole.

EQUAL ACCESS ACT

Equal Access Act

EDUCATION CHAPTER 52 - EDUCATION FOR ECONOMIC SECURITY SUBCHAPTER VIII - EQUAL ACCESS

20 U.S. CODE § 4071 - DENIAL OF EQUAL ACCESS PROHIBITED

(a) Restriction of limited open forum on basis of religious, political, philosophical, or other speech content prohibited

It shall be unlawful for any public secondary school which receives Federal financial assistance and which has a limited open forum to deny equal access or a fair opportunity to, or discriminate against, any students who wish to conduct a meeting within that limited open forum on the basis of the religious, political, philosophical, or other content of the speech at such meetings.

(b) “Limited open forum” defined

A public secondary school has a limited open forum whenever such school grants an offering to or opportunity for one or more noncurriculum related student groups to meet on school premises during noninstructional time.

(c) Fair opportunity criteria

Schools shall be deemed to offer a fair opportunity to students who wish to conduct a meeting within its limited open forum if such school uniformly provides that—

- (1) the meeting is voluntary and student-initiated;
- (2) there is no sponsorship of the meeting by the school, the government, or its agents or employees;
- (3) employees or agents of the school or government are present at religious meetings only in a nonparticipatory capacity;
- (4) the meeting does not materially and substantially interfere with the orderly conduct of educational activities within the school; and
- (5) nonschool persons may not direct, conduct, control, or regularly attend activities of student groups.

(d) Construction of subchapter with respect to certain rights

Nothing in this subchapter shall be construed to authorize the United States or any State or political subdivision thereof—

- (1) to influence the form or content of any prayer or other religious activity;
- (2) to require any person to participate in prayer or other religious activity;
- (3) to expend public funds beyond the incidental cost of providing the space for student-initiated meetings;
- (4) to compel any school agent or employee to attend a school meeting if the content of the speech at the meeting is contrary to the beliefs of the agent or employee;
- (5) to sanction meetings that are otherwise unlawful;
- (6) to limit the rights of groups of students which are not of a specified numerical size; or
- (7) to abridge the constitutional rights of any person.

(e) Federal financial assistance to schools unaffected

Notwithstanding the availability of any other remedy under the Constitution or the laws of the United States, nothing in this subchapter shall be construed to authorize the United States to deny or withhold Federal financial assistance to any school.

(f) Authority of schools with respect to order, discipline, well-being, and attendance concerns

Nothing in this subchapter shall be construed to limit the authority of the school, its agents or employees, to maintain order and discipline on school premises, to protect the well-being of students and faculty, and to assure that attendance of students at meetings is voluntary.