

How to Start a Student Organization for Liberty



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Note 1: Feel free to distribute this publication. The goal of Students For Liberty is to help as many students dedicated to liberty as possible. However, please give due credit to Students For Liberty for publishing the work and properly attribute information gathered from this publication to Students For Liberty.

Note 2: *How to Start a Student Organization for Liberty* is the product of past experiences and practices implemented by many students who have started their own organizations for liberty, compiled into a single document. This is only a first edition of the handbook, and the publication of future editions will rely heavily on the input of students like yourself reading this. If you have additional information you would like to share with others about how to start an organization, criticisms of the information presented in this handbook, or would otherwise like to help in the drafting of future editions, please email info@studentsforliberty.org with the subject “Start an Organization Handbook Comments”. We also love to hear success stories of students who used this book and often highlight student successes through a variety of our communications.



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Introduction: Why Start a Student Organization for Liberty?

If you are reading this handbook, I can assume that you are interested in the principles of liberty and recognize the importance of promoting liberty in both academia and society. There are two questions you may be asking yourself, though. First, is liberty a cause worthy enough for me to dedicate my time? Second, if liberty is a worthwhile cause, is starting a student organization the right thing to do? The first question I can easily answer. Liberty is constantly under attack in the modern world. In both society and academia, a belief in liberty is held by a minority of individuals in the face of a majority who seek authoritarian and oppressive policies that infringe individual rights. The stand must be taken now to rout greater support for liberty and protect the basic rights held by all individuals. The second question is more difficult, but can still be easily answered in the affirmative. That is what the rest of this introduction is dedicated to showing.

Superficially, there seems to be a contradiction in the notion of creating a structured organization comprised of individualists dedicated to liberty. But this contradiction is just that: superficial. The principles underlying a philosophy of liberty are those of free choice and the foundations of free association. There can be no legitimate interaction between human beings without beginning from the assumption that each individual is free and may choose what associations she wants to join. The community is not antithetical to individualism, but the legitimate product of a respect for each individual's choice to engage the community. When the community departs from this foundation and disrespects the individualism of its members, it is no longer a true community, but a site of conflict and warfare with factions competing for power. In this sense, socialism is the greatest misnomer in history. Socialism opposes the functioning of society *as a society*. It imposes the rule of one group of individuals upon another group of individuals rather than respect all individuals as equals. A truly social philosophy is one that embraces the nature of society as a group of individuals consenting to live amongst one another. In this sense, the true community is one comprised of so-called individualists where individuals live by their own terms and respect the rights of others to do the same. The true community is premised upon liberty. Creating a free association of individuals to promote liberty is in no way a contradiction, but rather, it is one of the greatest expressions of human power and freedom.

There are three reasons why forming an organization at the student level is important. The first is that the collegiate environment provides an ideal time to reach out to individuals interested in the ideas of liberty. During college, students are supposed to challenge their preconceived ideas and either learn that what they have been taught up to then is incorrect or legitimate in the face of opposing ideas. Whereas pro-liberty views may be silenced in other realms of life, they are more easily respected in an environment of free inquiry that college is supposed to represent. What's more, it is during this exchange of ideas in the collegiate years that most people form their life-long beliefs. School is a very impressionable time for individuals. Developing a clear presence of the philosophy of liberty in this environment is essential to the acceptance of the ideas of liberty by individuals in the future. Even if other students do not embrace liberty while in school, they will be much more likely to be tolerant and respectful of such ideas in the future if a student organization for liberty exists.



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Second, student organizations provide safe havens for students to explore the ideas of liberty in an otherwise hostile environment. The previous point emphasized the *ideal* of college as an open forum of ideas where constant debate and discourse occurs that shapes the beliefs of future society. Unfortunately, it is all too obvious that reality does not live up to this ideal. Students who believe in liberty often feel alone. They are tempted to sacrifice their beliefs for the sake of conformity with their peers and professors. However, an institutionalized organization that promotes liberty on campus, however, can provide both logistical and inspirational support for students interested in liberty. Not only is a student organization a forum to meet others who believe in liberty and discuss the intricacies of a philosophy of liberty in a welcoming environment. It is also a symbol students can look towards. Just knowing that there are others who support liberty can make all the difference in the world.

Third, as students, you can make a difference. Someone once commented to me, “We [students] are not just the future. We are the present too.” This statement is incredibly powerful. Preparing students to become the leaders of liberty in the future is one of the most obvious reasons to reach out to students. But rallying students to support the cause of liberty today has the tremendous potential to change society as we know it faster than anyone predicts. When you consider the impact that student protesters against the draft had in the 60’s of defining a generation, the support students rallied in opposition to apartheid South Africa in the 80’s, and the work of Venezuelan students to challenge dictatorial powers of Hugo Chavez and promote democracy today, it should be evident that students can transform society.

It is not only that student organizing can lead toward a freer society. Student organizing is the foundation of the future of liberty. By coming together, students can change the world. By starting a student organization, you are becoming an integral figure in the advancement of liberty, and therefore, the change in the world.

This handbook presents a 10 step process for forming a student organization for liberty. Some steps are more important than others and may be varied as appropriate for your school. In general, readers should take this handbook as a guide rather than science. The procedure of starting a student organization in this handbook has been developed from the experience of several individuals who have started student organizations on their own. Each organization will find its own path to success. Hopefully, this guidebook will give you the right ideas for what to do to become successful.

If you have any questions about the information provided in this book or seek additional help, SFL is here for you. SFL leaders have experience with starting and running student organizations for liberty and are well versed in advising organizations on problems you face. Many students have worked with SFL to start student organizations on their campus and we would be happy to lend as much support as possible to start an organization for liberty on your campus. Just email info@studentsforliberty.org with as much information as possible about the organization you want to start and we will respond shortly.



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10 Step Process to Starting a Student Organization

1. **Find Others**: A student organization is defined by the people who comprise it more than anything else. Especially when an organization is being formed, having a dedicated group of individuals who will dedicate their time and energy to the organization is absolutely crucial. Before you can do anything else, you need to find a group of 2-5 students (including yourself) who will make a serious effort to start the organization.
2. **Develop a Mission Statement**: To be effective, the purpose of your efforts and organization must be clearly laid out so you all know what you are working towards. The culmination of the discussion of why you want to start a student group should be a mission statement for the organization that all activities are measured against.
3. **Come Up With a Name**: Once you have established the mission of your organization, you should tailor the name to what you wish to accomplish. The name of the organization is how you will be known from here out so choose the name wisely.
4. **Learn Your School's Procedures**: To effectively run an organization on campus, you must know how to maneuver through your school's bureaucracy. Learn how to reserve rooms, access university funding, gain school recognition, etc. Become as knowledgeable as possible on how student organizations function within your school.
5. **Ratify a Constitution**: The Constitution of a student organization formalizes the organization's existence and lays out the rules for how the organization shall operate. Take time in drafting this document and ratify it according to your school's guidelines to make sure it will meet the approval of administrators.
6. **Develop a Strategic Action Plan**: With the establishment of your organization, you should agree on tangible goals for the upcoming semester/year and develop a strategy for achieving these goals. The document that summarizes this information is your Strategic Action Plan.
7. **Set Up a List-Serve**: Every organization needs a list-serve. Use this to send information to all students about what your organization is doing and keep in touch with members about what direction they would like to see the organization head in.
8. **Hold Events**: Hold regular events around campus that are open to the school community and advertise them heavily. An organization is about holding events and doing activities that accomplish your mission, so make sure to hold them often.
9. **Get School Recognition**: To make your organization official and institutionalize it, you should seek school recognition. Once you have school recognition, your organization will receive many benefits from the school that will help ensure its continued existence.
10. **Train New Leadership**: The final stage of starting a student organization is to ensure its long-term survival and make sure the organization is more than just its founders. Training younger students to take over the organization is crucial to turning a project of several individuals into an established organization.



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Step 1: Find Others

Once you've decided you're interested in starting a student organization for liberty, an immediate problem arises: an organization of one is no organization at all. Before you can do anything else, you must seek out others who are interested in starting an organization with you and bring them into the effort. Beyond this basic analysis, there are various other reasons why your first step when starting a student organization should be to find other students. First, starting an organization takes a lot of work. Having others there to take responsibility for different aspects of starting an organization and getting it off the ground is the only way to actually start a group. Second, having a group of students provides legitimacy to what you're doing. Rather than being one person who is trying to make a radical change on campus, you are a group of people who are trying to make a reasonable change.

Notice that I say your first step is to find other students. It is not to find anyone at all including non-students who support what you are doing. A common mistake is to rely on an outside organization to provide the support and framework to get a student organization off the ground. You cannot expect to develop a successful student organization by starting with non-students. Aside from non-students being unfamiliar with the desires of students generally and especially students on your campus, any support they provide is only valuable in the context of an established group of students already being in place on campus. Gaining support from external organizations can be an incredibly valuable tool. But don't begin by emailing some other organization and asking for their help. Begin by finding other students to join your cause and then you can look to bringing non-students into the fold.

The question now becomes: how do you find others to join you in undertaking the incredible task of starting a student organization? Here are a few recommendations.

- 1) *Friends*. If you have friends who support liberty like yourself, get them involved. Since you're already friends with them, this makes it much easier to work on the project together since you'll be hanging out anyhow.
- 2) *Facebook*. Find Facebook groups related to the actual organization you want to start and post on the wall. See if an admin for the group is willing to message everyone for you with a request that people help you start it up. This is a great way to find likeminded individuals.
- 3) *Flier Campus*. Draft up a simple flier announcing your intentions to form an organization and just spend an afternoon posting it around campus. It should include the date and location of an informational session where you will discuss the purpose of your organization. This method is not as effective as Facebook because it does not target people ideologically aligned with yourself, takes more time, and generally receives little response from people, but it's still an option if you can't find anyone.
- 4) *Other Organizations*. There are students who support liberty on every campus. If a student organization dedicated to liberty does not already exist on your campus, then



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these students are likely members of other organizations, which act as a temporary substitute (until your organization comes about). Look over the list of student organizations that already exist on your campus. Find the groups you think students interested in liberty have joined. Then start attending meetings and events of these groups, telling members there about your intentions of starting a new group. If you can make an announcement on the group's list-serve, that is a great way to spread word of your organization. Here are some groups to look for that often contain a high concentration of students interested in liberty:

- College Republicans
- College Democrats
- Debate Team
- Model U.N.
- Mock Trial
- Political Science Honors Society
- Economics Honors Society

Be careful with this method, though. Some groups will not take kindly to you poaching their members. So you have to be discrete in your efforts. However, other groups may be supportive of what you're doing if you don't directly conflict with their mission and represent an ideological opponent to them. It is possible for students to be members of both your organization and the organization in which you identify them, and if you emphasize from the start, people will be much more receptive to your organization's existence and success than if you start off as the "anti-____" organization.

All you need is a group of 2-5 dedicated students to get a new organization off the ground. Don't spend your time trying to get a dozen people to join an organization without knowing what the organization will be. Find your small group of dedicated founders, and move forward.



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Step 2: Develop a Mission Statement

Once you have a group of students who are dedicated to starting the organization, agreeing upon a common vision for the organization is the next step. Broadly, there are two themes that you must address in coming up with a mission statement: the values your organization embraces, and the activities you will engage in. These two issues should be addressed by your mission statement, which will serve as the guiding principle behind all future actions and events undertaken by the organization.

For student organizations dedicated to liberty, the **values** are perhaps the most important issue to tackle first. Figuring out what members in your organization stand for is crucial to understand why you want the organization to exist and to make sure you are not misrepresented by others¹. Sometimes this will be easy. If all of the founders are Objectivists and want to create an organization that advocates for an Objectivist philosophy, then it's pretty simple. But this may not be the case. You may bring individuals together with a general agreement that you want to support liberty, or maybe even a subset of liberty like Austrian Economics. It is important no matter what, to discuss each of the founders' personal beliefs and determine what principles you all agree on. Come to a consensus on what values are going to drive the existence of the organization and what all organizational efforts should promote, and make it explicit in your mission statement to hold future organizational leaders accountable to those principles.

A common mistake that student groups dedicated to liberty commonly commit is try to list every value the organization represents in as much detail as possible. While it's important to make your values known in the mission statement, having a two page list of values does no good. Not only does this run counter the purpose of a mission statement (which should be your 30-second pitch to other students and donors), but it is also needlessly confusing to have your organization revolve solely around such an in-depth document that will likely lead to confusion for future leadership and turn many people away who are not sure if they agree with every single clause included in the document. Your mission statement will ideally be one sentence, but no more than a paragraph long and refer to your principles without laying out a manifesto.

As for **activities**, there are three general types that you can engage in: networking, education, and activism. Networking involves providing a forum where individuals of a common belief may come together to meet one another. The purpose of this could be social since people who support liberty like to be in the company of others who support liberty. It could also be productive, with the intent of having supporters of liberty know one another and be able to work on future projects to advance liberty, whether that's during school or after graduation. Perhaps the most important reason to include some amount of networking in your organization's mission is that students who support liberty often feel alone on college campuses. Few individuals outwardly embrace these ideas and many students give up on their support for liberty because they think no one else agrees with them. Having an organization that brings

¹ It is important to note that others will misrepresent your organization no matter what you do. People try to classify beliefs under the different categories that they understand and endorse and many times, your organization will not fit their neat classification. You must do what you can at all times to make sure that your positions are not misrepresented, though, and that students do not confuse you for something that you are not.



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students who support liberty together leads to the mutual encouragement for individuals to stay strong in their beliefs and develop their enthusiasm for liberty.

Education is another big area that almost every student organization necessarily includes. As an organization for students, most of your members will probably have joined to learn more about the philosophy of liberty. No student, not even yourself, is an expert on the philosophy of liberty. There is always more to learn and advancing one's understanding of liberty should be an integral function of your organization. But don't just think about educating your members. Consider educating non-members of your university. This does not mean preach to others that libertarianism is the gospel truth, but hold debates and bring in speakers to teach people about the ideas of liberty. As an institution of learning, your organization will be missing an incredible opportunity to teach others about your beliefs if you do not make education fundamental to your organization's activities.

The last type of activities you can do are forms of activism. This could mean holding protests and demonstrations against a new city ordinance. This could mean taking on an illegitimate speech code at your university by writing op-eds to the school paper and petitioning the administration. The general theme underlying activism is an effort to make some sort of policy change in the near future.

A student organization is more than capable of subsuming all three of these types of activities at once. You can do social events along with a lecture series on liberty, and protest unjust laws. But you may not want to do this. If there is a tangible problem you want to address on campus, networking is not such an issue as activism. If your campus is too politically apathetic to raise any attention from this activity, though, then you may want to focus on education and networking. It's important to think about what you want to get out of the organization and what sort of change you hope to make.

Here are some sample mission statements of actual organizations:

University of Pennsylvania Libertarian Association

“The purpose of the organization and its activities are:

- a. To promote an understanding of and support for libertarian principles within the student body of the University of Pennsylvania;
- b. To engage in debate and dialogue about libertarianism's meaning, political efficacy and social desirability;
- c. To engage in political activism that upholds libertarian principles both on campus and in the surrounding political community;
- d. To serve as a liaison between the administration and faculty and the members of the University of Pennsylvania Libertarian Association.”

Grove City College Students for Liberty

“The purpose of the Students for Liberty is engaging the Grove City College community in discussing the ideas of a free society. Our goal is to create student interest in these ideas; to both strengthen interest and introduce others to liberty.”



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Lastly, while it is not a campus organization, the mission of Students For Liberty is “to provide a unified, student-driven forum of support for students and student organizations dedicated to liberty”. This mission statement encompasses SFL’s key areas of interest without being overly specific as to preclude the progress and development of the organization’s activities. The target demographic is not only students as individuals, but student organizations because we believe student organizations are crucial to advancing liberty on campus. By providing a forum of support, it is not simply access to resources, but a forum where students are encouraged to participate and share their knowledge and resources with others. SFL as an organization is intended to provide a unified front that brings students together, rather than push them away. And at all times, SFL is to be driven by students to make sure that an organization for students is always led by the students themselves.



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Step 3: Come Up With a Name

At first glance, this step does not seem to be so important. The name of your organization is merely a few words. However, the organization's name is, quite literally, the way you are known on campus. The terms you include will produce immediate connotations in the minds of listeners and so you must make sure that it conveys what you want it to do so and avoid connotations that you do not want to have. The purpose is to represent the mission of your organization in as appealing a manner as possible

Here are some potential terms that you can include in your name that deserve special consideration:

1. *Libertarian*- If you are a libertarian organization and wish to express yourself as such, then this is a good name. If you are not affiliated with the Libertarian Party, though, but instead advocate the philosophy of libertarianism, then the name may cause you problems. The first thing people think about when they hear the term libertarian is the LP. This has caused other organizations much difficulty in the past with recruitment and funding. It is a question of whether you prioritize expressing your organization for what you believe in and being more appealing to more people.
2. *Liberty*- Liberty is a safe word to use for your organization. The term connotes only good things in people's minds. Liberty is that which everyone seeks to have. It also leaves open the possibility of various views on the subject. But this may also be its downside. When you advocate for liberty, people are not necessarily sure what exactly you support and so further clarification may be necessary. Some groups have adopted the term "individual liberty" to make their purpose more explicit, which you may want to consider as well.
3. *Freedom*- "Freedom" or "Free" is another safe term to use similar to liberty.
4. *College/Campus*- If you include the term "college" or "campus" in your name, you suggest that you are affiliated with a national, political organization. Think of the College Democrats and College Republicans.

The terms are not the only issue, though. Make sure to think about what your acronym will be. For example, the original name for the University of Pennsylvania Libertarian Association was going to be the Penn Libertarian Organization. Luckily, someone pointed out, though, that the acronym would be PLO and be too reminiscent of the Palestinian Liberation Organization, which we did not want people to affiliate with us when they heard our name.

The name of your organization is very important. Don't just think of what you do want to be called. Also think of what you don't want to be called. Make your choice wisely.



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Step 4: Learn Your School's Procedures

With the foundations of an organization in place, it's important for you to take the time to learn just how student organizations function within your school's bureaucracy. Each school has procedures in place for dealing with student groups that you need to learn to survive. You will be existing within the university's bureaucracy, so you need to figure out how to maneuver it. Here are some important things you should learn from the outset:

- What are the requirements for becoming a recognized student organization?
- What are the benefits of becoming a recognized student organization?
- How do you reserve rooms for events on campus?
- Are there restrictions to reserving rooms on campus?
- What sorts of events are allowed on campus?²
- How can you receive school funding for your organization?³
- How can you get around much of the school's red tape?

Now that you know what you need to learn, the issue becomes figuring out how you can find out what these procedures are. Here are a few tips:

- Look at your school's website for information on student groups and how to become a recognized official group. This is a good place to start, but it should not be the end.
- Ask friends who are leaders of currently existing student groups or who have started student groups themselves.
- If you have worked with any administrators in the past to put on an event or work out a difficult class schedule, ask them to refer you to the appropriate department.

It's also important to not lose this information once you find it. Especially when you think about long-term, you will need to pass on this information to future leaders of the organization. Keep notes on how everything works and continually update it as new situations and problems come along that you fix. Having this information readily at hand will save you many headaches in the future and may help ensure the survival of the organization past your time.

² It is important to keep in mind that some events, like protests or demonstrations, may only be allowed in "free speech zones" on your campus. Many such zones still exist that only permit students to speak freely in designated areas at designated times. If you don't comply with such regulations, you may be severely sanctioned. If restrictive speech policies are in place on your campus or you find that your organization may be sanctioned for what you consider to be legitimate activities on campus, contact the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (www.thefire.org), a watchdog organization that can give advice on how to properly handle your situation.

³ The issue of accepting funding from your school is controversial in advocates of liberty. Some see no problem with this practice. Others believe it's a means of forcefully taking money away from other students to support a particular ideology. Ultimately, your organization will have to decide which side of this issue you agree with. But one thing that's important to keep in mind is that every student chose to attend your school freely and if you don't use the money to support liberty, it may likely be used by others to hinder liberty.



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Step 5: Ratify a Constitution

To formalize your organization and begin the process of institutionalization, you next need to draft up and ratify a constitution. The purpose of this is not to lay out every detail of the organization, but recognize the organization's existence and provide the general framework from which it will function.

Some schools have no regulations for the structure of a constitution, whereas other schools require particular sections be included in the constitution. No matter what your school's requirements are, here is a list of essential sections that you need to cover in your constitution:

- 1) Name
- 2) Mission Statement
- 3) Executive Board
 - a. Structure of the Board (distribution of responsibilities)
 - b. Election of the Board
- 4) Membership
- 5) Amendments
- 6) Ratification

Additional sections that you may choose to include as you so choose include:

- 1) Meetings
- 2) Affiliations
- 3) Code of Conduct

It's important not to get too caught up on this step. Many students starting an organization think that the constitution is the most important thing to forming a group. It's not... by far. The constitution lays down explicit guidelines for how the organization is to be run, but is only effective if you create rules that actually work. Think of it like the concept of spontaneous order. Creating rules that people don't want to follow because they are inefficient or ineffective does no good for an organization. First engage in effective organizing and afterwards you will learn what rules work and which ones don't. Not every procedure for how the organization is to be run needs to be listed in the constitution. Much like the Constitution of a government, the constitution of a student group provides the framework within which group activities occur and later rules or laws can clarify issues so long as they are aligned with the constitution. As well, many traditions and social mores will arise that don't need to be written down, but can just be accepted by members.

Note: A sample constitution is provided in Appendix B.



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Step 6: Set Goals

Why are you starting this organization? What do you want to see it accomplish? How are you going to accomplish this? These are the main questions you now need to ask yourself and answer. These will direct you towards making explicit both your long-term and short-term goals. Most of your long-term goals should have been addressed during the formation of your mission statement. Your goals do not need to be written into your mission statement because the mission statement is primarily about your values. But you should have some concept of what you want to see your organization look like in ten years. These long-term goals can be as simple as having a continually existing presence on campus where students feel safe to support liberty with others around them. Or your long-term goals can be more dramatic like establishing a pro-liberty presence on campus that rivals authoritarianism.

More importantly than establishing long-term goals, though, you need to create very specific and tangible short-term goals. These goals should align with the way you measure success of your organization and know that your time has been valuable. Some sample measures include:

- The number of members who regularly attend meetings
- The number of emails on your list-serve
- The number of events held in the semester
- The amount of money raised for the organization
- The number of policies changed on campus as a result of your efforts

Once you set your specific goals, you should write up a Strategic Action Plan, which formats your goals into an easily understandable list through a timeline of the semester. This plan should list each goal, when actions need to be taken to complete it, when the goal should be completed, who is responsible for it, and an immediate list of things to do to complete your goals. By doing this, you take your goals from simply being ideals that you hope to achieve, and create tangible means of accomplishing them to begin implementing immediately.

Note: A sample Strategic Action Plan is provided in Appendix C.



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Step 7: Set Up a List-Serve

The list-serve should be created early on, but it should not be an immediate project. The problem with starting a list-serve as soon as you have an idea that you want to start an organization is that it will likely fail in the beginning. If the list-serve is not active, it sets the precedent for its members to not check messages sent over the list-serve and to treat your organization as defunct. Starting the list-serve once you have momentum behind you makes the organization look much better and keeps people more involved.

The list-serve should be a single email address that you, other executive officers, and perhaps members, can easily type in and send out to a large number of people. You should not type in every person's email address into the "to" box because it looks extremely unprofessional, you will inevitably make a mistake in who you're sending the message to, and people will start replying-all to the list-serve and cause many members to take themselves off. Use either a Google Groups list-serve or a university list-serve account depending on your preference. Either one works. (Many, if not most, student organizations use Google Group list-serves to avoid university bureaucracy, costs with getting a list-serve address, and other problems associated with a school address.)

Once you have a list-serve set up, you need to add as many people to it as possible. Don't sign people up for the list-serve when they don't want to be on there. But whenever you talk with people about your organization, ask for their email and let them know you'll add them to the list-serve so they get information from your organization. Have sign-up sheets at every speaker event, every activities fair, and every meeting you hold to make sure everyone knows what you're doing. But at the same time, don't think the list-serve is enough. You need to make personal connections with people you meet and follow up with them one on one or else they're going to get lost in the fray. The list-serve is the first step to staying in touch with people. Sending a personal email or calling new members is a great way to make them feel appreciated and involved, and cannot be overstated in terms of importance.

Note: To set up a Google Groups list-serve, just go to www.groups.google.com. Complete the basic details and send out an invitation to everyone to join. You do not need a Google email account to sign up for the group. (But if you don't have a Gmail account yet, you should consider doing so because it is easier to send large files with.) From there out, you can just add people to the list-serve or send invitations for them to join.



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Step 8: Hold Events

Meetings are an important part of any organization to go over administrative issues and deal with any subjects of importance to the membership. However, events are what make or break an organization. You need to have fun activities that members identify with your organization. If someone were to ask you: “What does your organization do?”, your activities would be the answer.

The most common and basic event to hold is the regular meeting. This should either be weekly or bi-monthly to keep members involved. Cover administrative issues at these meetings, but have something else to make it exciting. The most common thing to do is to have a debate/discussion right after administrative details on issues pertaining to liberty. This is a great way to get members excited about liberty, interacting with one another, and do it all with minimal effort.

You need to do more than just hold regular meetings, though. Here is a short list of events you can hold:

- Bring a speaker to campus
- Movie Night
- Debate another student organization (e.g. the campus socialists)
- Social
- Go to dinner together
- Protest
- Demonstration
- Visit another student organization dedicated to liberty at a nearby campus
- Attend a Students For Liberty Conference (Attending events outside your university is a great way to build camaraderie and bonds between members. And Students For Liberty Conferences are incredibly fun events as well.)

As a final note, there are two times of the year when you should hold a big event: the start of the fall and spring semesters. At the start of the school year, you need to hold a big kick-off event to impress freshmen and potential members. The best way to do this is to bring in a big name speaker from a recognizable organization. Your goal with this event is to make students think, “Wow. If they can bring that person to campus, they must be a good organization. I want to be part of that group.” You should plan another big event for the start of the second semester to remind members why they are involved in the organization and to get them excited for the rest of the year. After winter break, many students become lackadaisical with responsibilities and stop attending organization meetings. A big event can counter this trend, though, and make them enthusiastic about getting back involved for the second semester.



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Step 9: Get School Recognition

Some benefits that groups are often afforded from recognition:

- University funding
- Easy access to university space
- Ability to register in student activities fairs
- Greater ability to flier campus

Some costs that you should take into account are:

- Requirement to attend meetings for student government
- Limitations of mission given that you're a political organization
- Greater accountability for actions to the university
- Limitations on marketing strategies given university restrictions

For young organizations, participation in student activities fairs may be the greatest benefit of becoming a recognized organization. Student activities fairs are the one time when new students explore what organizations exist and decide which groups to join. It is an incredible opportunity to get meet potential members and get their email addresses to keep in touch with them.

This step is entirely dependent on your school's policies. It may be that the benefits from gaining recognition are not worth the many costs you must incur to do so. If the university administration provides an excessive number of roadblocks to starting a recognized club, don't feel compelled to seek formal recognition. Many successful organizations have no university affiliation. The most important thing that makes a club successful are the people, not the affiliation. Generally, however, gaining recognition is important to making people take your organization more seriously and accessing school resources, including such a basic resource as space to hold meetings.



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Step 10: Train New Leadership

All your previous work in starting a student organization is for naught if the organization does not survive past your time. You should not simply be focused on the success of your organization during your own school days, but also during your time as an alumnus. This issue will not be discussed in-depth in this handbook because it is to be the subject of a separate handbook. This is such an important issue that it cannot be addressed in such short space. However, once you have grounded an organization, you must immediately start looking to the future. Do not joke with others that the group will die when you graduate or else you've just wasted years of your life. Identify potential leaders who can take over the group when you are younger. Put the lessons you learn along the way in writing so you can easily transfer the information to future leaders. And ingrain the importance of your organization and the success of your organization in the minds of new members who join.

By starting to do these things and always thinking about the future, you will be able to have dinner with its members when you come back to school at your 5-year reunion. When that happens, you'll know that you've created an actual organization that has made a lasting difference. And that is the reason why you're reading this.



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Appendix A: The Penn Libertarian Association as an Example

1. **Find Others-** PLA began when I posted on a facebook group wall that I was interested in starting a libertarian organization on campus. I had no serious libertarian friends in my usual crowds and while it took time to find people, I found 2 other dedicated individuals, one through the facebook posts and one through our first speaker event. Without them, the organization never would have started.
2. **Develop a Mission Statement-** PLA initially focused on education and activism, but over time we abandoned the emphasis on activism to focus on education and networking. We found activism to not be worth the time put in and realized that networking libertarians with one another was crucial to the organization's success. PLA has no partisan affiliation.
3. **Come Up With A Name-** The University of Pennsylvania Libertarian Association reflected our outspoken support of the libertarian philosophy, but as an association, it is still open to a wide range of individuals who have different means of promoting libertarianism. It is worth noting, though, that the name of PLA, however, has been a constant issue of debate since the organization's founding and illustrates the importance of choosing the most appropriate name for your group.
4. **Learn Your School's Procedures-** I asked friends on the undergraduate assembly (the student government at Penn) about how to start an organization as well as my friends in other organizations.
5. **Ratify a Constitution-** The Constitution was drafted by myself, edited by others and ratified within 2 months of initially starting the organization. Our school rules require a ratified constitution to be in effect for 6 months before a group can apply for recognition.
6. **Set Goals-** We set goals for a number of events, debates with other organizations and fundraising deadlines.
7. **Set Up a List-Serve-** Our emails contain information on meetings, events, and other news that libertarians may be interested in, but not hear much of through usual campus sources.
8. **Hold Events-** We began holding bimonthly meetings in the same room at the same time with lectures and debates in addition to administrative issues. We also began doing other events. In the first semester, we brought in a former candidate for governor of Pennsylvania who spoke about libertarianism and the political process. From heavily advertising this event, we were able to raise interest by several new students, including one that would be pivotal in the organization's success. We also engaged in a public debate on the death penalty sponsored by the college chapter of the ACLU, which further got our name out there and gave us something to prepare for.
9. **Get School Recognition-** It took us almost a year to obtain university recognition. Even when we got recognition, we were denied access to university funds because our organization was "political". After 2 years of fighting for the right to access university funds, the PLA began to receive minimal support, but it is a constant struggle for equal rights.
10. **Train New Leadership-** I served two terms as President of the PLA to get the organization up and running. In December, 2007, though, a new executive board was elected into office after I spent the past semester training most to take positions.



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Appendix B: Sample Constitution⁴

Article I. Name

The official name of the organization shall be the University of Freedom Libertarian Association.

Article II. Mission Statement

The purpose of the organization and its activities are:

- e. To promote an understanding of and support for libertarian principles within the student body of the University of Freedom;
- f. To engage in debate and dialogue about libertarianism's meaning, political efficacy and social desirability;
- g. To engage in political activism that upholds libertarian principles both on campus and in the surrounding political community;
- h. To serve as a liaison between the administration and faculty and the members of the University of Freedom Libertarian Association.

Article III. Executive Board: Structure

- a. The board members will have one of the following titles and responsibilities. Nonetheless, all board members are expected to participate and organize all events regardless of their positions.
 1. President
 - The President calls meetings, sets agenda, communicates with local media, and sets the general goals for the Penn Libertarians for the year.
 2. Treasurer
 - The Treasurer calls meetings and fulfills the President's responsibilities in the absence of the President.
 - The Treasurer oversees all committees formed for the Penn Libertarians and acts as liaison between the committees and the executive board.
 - The Treasurer manages the organization's finances and attends SAC meetings.
 3. Secretary
 - The Secretary takes minutes at all general body and executive committee meetings. The minutes of the general body meetings shall be sent out among the Penn Libertarians list-serve.
 - The Secretary maintains and updates the Penn Libertarians website, list-serve and all technical services the organization may require.
 - The Secretary organizes and plans all Penn Libertarians events.
 - The Secretary will be in charge of the publicity of the Penn Libertarians.
- b. If an office is vacated, the procedure for regular elections should be used to fill the position with the consent of a majority of the board members.
- c. An officer may be removed from his or her office after being impeached at one meeting and then voted on by a 2/3 majority of voting members at the next general body meeting. Preceding the vote, the one member shall have 5 minutes to explain why the officer should be impeached and then the officer shall have 5 minutes to defend him or herself.

Article IV. Elections

- a. Elections are to be held once a year, in the month of December, and the term of the new board will start on the following January.

⁴ Note: The "University of Freedom" is not a real school.



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- b. Nominations will be taken from the floor, needing a second to the motion, then posted until all nominations are heard.
- c. Only registered, full-time undergraduate students who are not expected to graduate in the following May and have not missed more than four general body meetings in the semester may run for a position.
- d. Preceding elections night, each candidate must send out a candidacy statement concerning their platform and why they should be elected.
- e. The votes will be tabulated by the current board members who are not running for the office being voted upon.
- f. A majority of the voting body is necessary to win the election. If no candidate receives a majority of the votes, the top two vote receiving candidates for that office will be voted on by the voting constituency with the candidates who failed to receive one of the top two levels of votes being able to vote as well.
- g. Elections should be announced at least two weeks in advance.

Article V. Membership

- a. Any undergraduate who signs the Penn Libertarians listserv can be a member of the organization. There are no different categories of membership, aside from board positions.

Article VI. Meetings

- a. Board meetings consisting of the Officers of the University of Freedom Libertarians will occur once weekly and general meetings for all members will occur once every two weeks, or at the discretion of the Executive Board. Board meetings will precede general meetings by one week and will assist the president to set the agenda for the general meeting. The Executive Board may also invite other Penn Libertarian members to each board meeting as they see fit.
- b. The President will send out emails to all members notifying them of general meeting times and locations.
- c. The Executive Board will suggest organizational decisions at board meetings and the President will have final approval over these decisions.
- d. A quorum at general meetings consists of a majority of the Executive Board and at least four members of the general body.
- e. Any member is eligible to vote at meetings.
- f. Parliamentary Procedure need not be used during meetings, but may be requested and used by a majority decision.

Article VII. Amendments

An amendment to the Constitution must be proposed at two consecutive meetings whereby it is discussed in full at the second of these meetings as well as voted on. A two thirds majority of voting members present at the second meeting is required to pass the motion.

Article VIII. Affiliations

The Executive Board is responsible for maintaining any affiliations.

Article IX. Ratification

This Constitution will become ratified when it is signed by two thirds of the founding University of Freedom Libertarians.



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Appendix C: Sample Strategic Action Plan

- I. **Purpose:** With one final semester as President of The Organization (TO), I am making it my goal to establish this organization as one of the most active, well-known and productive student organizations on this campus. We have a group of dedicated, talented and incredible individuals already and it is time to tap that potential. My hope is that when I step down as President at the end of this semester, I will hand off an organization that will exist many years beyond not only my graduation, but the graduation of everyone who is reading this. This strategic action plan is meant to be a starting point, not the end, so please provide suggestions for improvement.

- II. **Goals:** We need to set several pertinent goals for this fall for us to make the organization grow. Here are the goals I envision:
 - a. **Recruitment:** Increase TO membership by at least 100%. This means 15 individuals at each regular meeting and 30 individuals at each speaker event.
 - b. **Events:**
 - i. At least one speaker per month as an event.
 - ii. At least one Libertarian Social per month
 - iii. Publication of the alternative student paper
 - c. **Institutionalization:** To make the organization more institutionalized and long-lasting, we need to accomplish the following goals:
 - i. Bi-monthly meetings held regularly in the same room every time. I want fliers to read something like “First and third Tuesday of every month in Room ___”
 - ii. Every exec board member must be present at every meeting. There is little chance that new members will have respect for an organization that the exec board members don’t show respect for.
 - iii. Elections will be set a month in advance and held with a formal process.

- III. **Pre-Semester Activities:**
 - a. **Blog-** Before NSO, everyone should make at least one post on the blog to give new students something to read. Once school begins, everyone will write two blog posts a month to keep it fresh and keep students visiting the page. Posts can cover a range of issues including national news, city politics, campus news, the activities of other organizations, the way classes are going, reviews of bars/restaurants, whatever to keep it active.
 - i. Information on the type of collaborative blog this will become: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Collaborative_blog
 - ii. **To Do:** Everyone I send this to should get an account set up on the blog and make at least one post before NSO so students have a reason to visit the site in the first place. **Email me to verify you are interested in doing this and I will get you set up.**
 - b. **Alternative Campus Newspaper-** We need articles written. Ask any of your friends to write any article they want to. They don't have to be political commentary. They can also include things like restaurant reviews around



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campus, bar reviews, an essay on Penn traditions, list of classes/professors students should take, anything that will attract freshmen's attention.

i. **To Do:**

1. Set up a Bank account
2. Write up a new grant application to the Collegiate Network
3. Assign someone position as Editor/Publisher
4. Find a printer on campus to print the paper
5. Get at least 10 articles written by August 25
6. Have layout ready by August 27

c. **Students Rights Night-** This will be our kickoff event for the year. After students have gone through New Student Orientation and learned about the rules and restrictions imposed upon them at school, we will tell them what rights they have and how they can challenge abuses of school power.

i. **To Do:** Anyone who wants to be involved in setting this up, please email me back to help me get a room, get food, market and finalize the schedule for the event.

d. **Think You're Conservative/Liberal? Think Again!:**

i. **To Do:**

1. I have drafted sample fliers for people to look over. They are attached to this email. Please give feedback and comments on them as they are merely rough drafts and need revision still.
2. Whoever is on campus just before NSO should help out posterage them around campus so freshmen see them first thing! Email me and let me know if you'll be around.

IV. **Semester Activities:**

a. **Incorporate the organization-** To get more donations, we should make ourselves a 501(c)(3). I need someone to step up to take care of this, so please volunteer. I have been through the process before and so will go through it with you, but someone young (has at least 1 more year) should take this over.

b. **Bimonthly meetings-** 2 meetings a month on the same days, time, and place (1st and 3rd Tuesday for example). The meetings should include status reports from committees, discussions of the direction of the organization and then a 10 minute lecture on a pertinent libertarian topic followed by discussion of the issue.

c. **Libertarian Socials-** Perhaps the most valuable service we can provide the campus community is to build a social network for individuals with libertarian leanings to be able to meet others with similar sentiments. I think we all understand the pressures to give up libertarianism in college and how difficult it can be if you think you are the only libertarian out there. Once a month I would like us to advertise and host a social event where TO members get together to hang out and chat and for everyone to bring other potential members to the event. Not only will this be a recruitment effort, but also it is just an opportunity for libertarians to interact with one another more and build a name for ourselves. If we just have small events but do them well and hold them regularly, we can make a name for ourselves and the organization as a place to go.



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- d. Speaker Series- At least one speaker a month. I want people to start thinking about who we can bring in and take the initiative to bring them to campus. Just let me know who you're thinking of, but then I want you to go out there and set it up. To bring a speaker to campus, just contact them or their organization and say you want them to speak, set up a night that would work well for them, reserve a room and then go through our normal advertisement process.
- e. V for Vendetta event-
 - i. Movie Night on November 5 of *V for Vendetta*
 - ii. Youtube clip- This would be really nerdy but fun, but we could film someone in costume explaining how the current situation is bad and oppressive. We can then put it on Youtube and link to our site if we are so inclined.
- f. Libertarians v. Socialists Debate- Following last year, we will host another public debate against the campus socialists. I want serious prep for it this time as our strategy should be to use this to bring more people to our side from a historical/empirical angle rather than philosophical (the reverse strategy did not seem to be the most effective last time from audience comments, so let's just hit them hard with the numbers and facts).



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Appendix D: About the Author

Alexander McCobin is co-founder and Executive Director of Students For Liberty. Alexander recognized the formal principles of his beliefs after reading *Atlas Shrugged*, a birthday present from his father in 9th grade. Throughout high school, Alexander participated in Lincoln-Douglas debate, which allowed him to study philosophy and particularly those who advocated the philosophical principles of liberty. During college at the University of Pennsylvania, Alexander began the University of Pennsylvania Libertarian Association to promote discussion and education of libertarianism on campus, which has since become one of the most recognizable and influential political groups on Penn's campus. He also began Perspectives Debate Incorporated, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization to promote youth debate education to underserved students in the greater Philadelphia and mid-Atlantic region, which has served over 450 students from 8 states and included over 125 volunteers.

Alexander graduated from the University of Pennsylvania in May, 2008, with his B.A. and M.A. Alexander is spending the 2008-2009 year as a Koch Associate at the Cato Institute and plans to begin his Ph.D. in philosophy in the fall of 2009.