

STUDENTS FOR A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY

Student Power for
Accessible Education

ORGANIZING GUIDE



Demonstrating in DC against global warming for a clean energy future!



Funk the War dance party at the Republican National Convention '08 – dancing against the war and towards fair economic policies!



Tabling to make college affordable at one of hundreds of our campus chapters!



Welcome

WE ARE STUDENTS, AND WE WROTE this guide for other students who are committed to social change. We hope it will help you take action on the critical issues of our generation. We know how hard it can be to feel hopeful and effective - but we also know that when we work together, we can achieve amazing things. SDS is already transforming schools across the country. An international student movement is rising. As the old saying goes, **“If not now...when? If not us....who?”**

Check out our website:

<http://newsds.org>

Join our national Accessible Education email list to participate in campaign discussions and know what we're up to:

<http://groups.google.com/group/spfae>

All SDS members should be on our national Announcements List to learn about trainings, demonstrations, workshops and more in your area:

<http://groups.google.com/group/sdsannouncements/>

Email us with questions or feedback:

sdseducation@gmail.com

Special thanks to Robin Markle, Zack Hershman, JeffRousset, Pasha Mamontov, and Daniel Meltzer for their work on this guide.

HOT TIPS for VICTORIOUS CAMPAIGNS:

Work in Coalition

Working with other groups is one of the best ways to grow quickly, get a lot of work done, appear legitimate and credible, and influence powerholders or student government. It also builds your strength for the long term and gives valuable experience. Reach out to others but respect that they have their own work to do.

Use the Media

Universities are terrified of bad media coverage. Send out press releases to newspapers and TV stations before big actions. Local news affiliates love to cover student protests – but they also like to make you look like stereotypes. Good media coverage can be great for your group, but plan your messaging and talking points carefully!! Use common language and appeal to a broad audience.

Also, BE the media! Write your own articles and stories for your school paper, and post on the web. Plaster your school with stickers, flyers, posters. Get on the radio! Be heard and be seen! Communicate!

Congratulations on your winning strategy! It's important to grow SLOW and STRONG. Maintain a sense of urgency, but don't rush! Don't take on work that you can't accomplish. Slow and steady really does win the race.

Congratulations! You've built an SDS chapter, launched a campaign, and created a solid plan to radically transform your school and your community. Thanks for all your hard work. We hope to get to know you better. For now, we've included links to some online resources that may help your group, as well as connect you to us and some of our friends. Good luck! Peace!

Create a Timeline

It's helpful to create a timeline for your campaign. Plan your term. Map out which weeks you want to have certain events and actions that will help educate your campus and win folks over to your side. Make a schedule for outreach and tabling too. Meetings are generally held weekly. Try to regularly have spaces to keep people plugged in and involved with the group. Do work and have fun. Build a community. PLAN as much as you can, and keep evaluating your group!

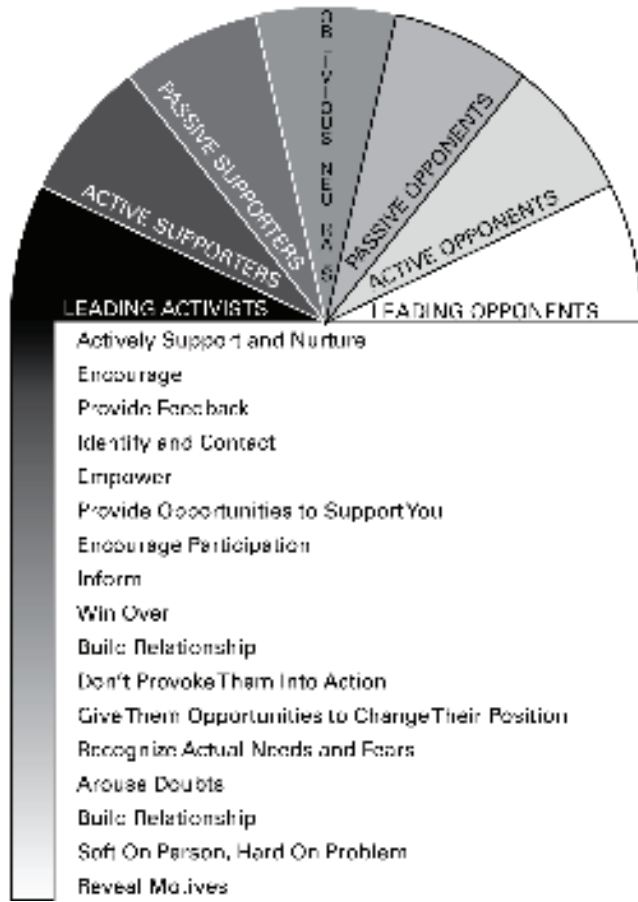
Don't be Discouraged

Of course no one wins all the time. Even if you don't get what you want, the campaign process only makes your group stronger. Just hang in there – powerholders are humans. They don't want to deal with your shit forever. They're gonna try and buy you off. Happily accept their tiny concessions, thank them publicly for supporting your cause, then go after them even harder.

Here's a helpful tool called the Spectrum of Allies:

Plug different groups on your campus into this chart. Then, use TACTICS to move groups from one slice of the spectrum over to the left.

Use outreach and organizing to get new folks involved and turn passive supporters into active ones! Turn neutral bystanders into allies by creating a situation on your campus that makes students choose sides. Use events and actions to put pressure on active opponents to make them sympathetic to your views and reluctant to work against you.

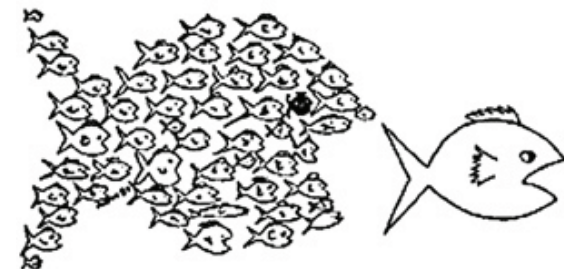


When you ask yourself where people on your campus fit into the different "slices of the pie" on the spectrum, it can make your campaign feel a lot more winnable! As you build your campaign, you can start to shift everyone over toward your end of the spectrum. Soon there will be so many of you that you'll overwhelm your opponents!

18

TABLE of CONTENTS

Who is SDS?	4
Why Do We Demand Student Power for Accessible Education?	6
How to Build Student Power!	8
Hot Tips for Organizers	12
Plan to Win: Campaign Strategy and Tactics	14
Hot Tips for Victorious Campaigns	19



ORGANIZE!

WHO is SDS?

STUDENTS FOR A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY (SDS) IS AMERICA'S LARGEST AND fastest growing student-led organization! We're a non-partisan and grassroots organization. We are fighting to win change for our schools and our communities at over 150 chapters around the nation. In just two short years, we have mobilized thousands of students in a popular movement to change this country from the bottom up.

We are a STUDENT POWER organization, which means that we are led by students and we fight for student issues. Right now, skyrocketing debt is making college unaffordable for many. Climate change threatens the planet that we stand to inherit. Over 4000 American soldiers, many of them young students, have lost their lives in Iraq – in a war largely paid for by cuts to education. Students are on the front lines of the struggle for democracy, which is why we refuse to pay for the mistakes of the last generation!

That is why we have just launched our first national campaign – STUDENT POWER FOR ACCESSIBLE EDUCATION. Over 65% of all college students average over 20,000 dollars in debt when they finish their undergraduate education, but tuition continues to increase every year. We demand lower tuition, lower fees, cheaper textbooks, need-based financial aid, and real student leadership in the university. And we're already winning.

- BROWN SDS built a gigantic Student Union and won the lowest tuition increase in a quarter century.
- PACE SDS forced the resignation of their corrupt President and won a campus-wide tuition freeze.
- RUTGERS SDS got their town council to pass an anti-war resolution and has been winning legal victories towards a change in the voting system for their entire county, creating more democratic opportunity for local, low-income families to hold office.
- HARVARD SDS held a hunger strike in support of campus security guards until they won a set of demands and benefits from the school.
- OLYMPIA SDS and TACOMA SDS since 2006 have been involved in ongoing nonviolent actions blocking war shipments to and from Iraq out of local ports.
- VCU SDS won a sexual assault resource center for their campus.
- OHIO U, ATHENS SDS has been taking over their student Senate. They organized a massive and successful vote of no-confidence in their university president and have built a powerful coalition of faculty, staff, and students from across the political spectrum.
- DC SDS, on the 5th Anniversary of the War in Iraq, led a 600 student "Funk the War" dance party that shut down the streets of D.C. and closed the offices of war profiteers and military recruiters. A dozen students chained themselves to desks to protest federal cuts to education.



The thing to remember about this timeline is – all of these steps happen simultaneously! You never stop investigating, you never stop educating and informing students, you never stop demonstrating, you never stop negotiating. And if you can hold it down, your chapter will grow in size and strength, upwards and upwards until you win. And then you pick some more, bigger goals, make a strategy, plan some tactics, and ring the bell for round 2.

One last thing. When you start winning, the administration is going to start repressing you. They might try and shut down your events, cut your funding, target your members, or just hassle you with bureaucratic crap. Don't panic! That's all part of the plan. Just expose them and publicize their attacks. It will rally huge support for your cause. Many campaigns are won because the administration goes too far and loses support. Just be patient and keep putting more pressure on – let them make the mistake. They will lose. As Ghandi said,

“First they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they fight you, then you win.”

Good Luck!

Of course, a little pressure never hurts. So, how do we put the “power” in Student Power? TACTICS are how we use our organization to put pressure on powerholders.

There are tons of tactics that you can use to put pressure on people! Letter writing campaigns, petitions, protests, public theater and art, student speak-outs, educational workshops, press articles, sit-ins, dance parties, personal conversations, student and faculty strikes, you name it.

Once we identify our goals, we escalate our tactics to increase the pressure we put on powerholders. So, first we flier. Then we hold a teach-in. Then we submit a petition. Then we hold a rally. Then we get the Student Government to pass a resolution. Then we submit a list of demands to the school president. Then we stage a sit-in at the administration building. Then we hold a student and faculty strike and bring the news cameras. We keep escalating tactics until they give in!

Figure out who has influence over the powerholder that can give you your goals – then pressure them too! Your target will feel the heat!

Start with simple tactics that build up our credibility among students and powerholders. We don't want to scare anyone off or appear unreasonable. As the administration refuses to listen to our nice gestures (letters, petitions, meetings, student government resolutions) the student body will become more and more convinced that more drastic action is necessary (protests, demonstrations, sit-ins, strikes) and they will join you!! But we need to build people's confidence and commitment up – the sit-in in the president's office comes after a year of campaigning, it's not the kick-off party! Plus, the more build-up you have, the more meaningful it'll be when you finally barge into that office.

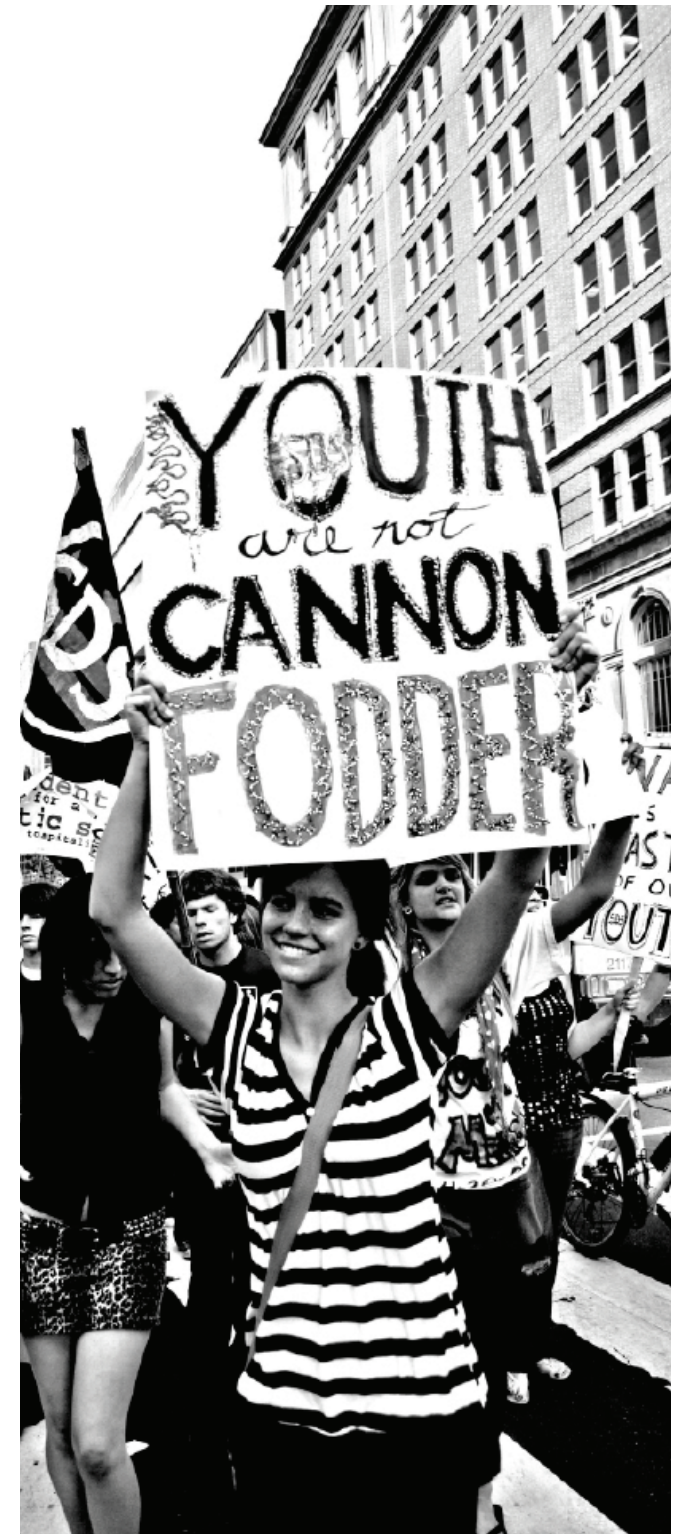
The general timeline for a campaign goes like this:

- Investigate and research the Goals you want to win
- Educate the whole student body with teach-ins and workshops and literature
- Demonstrate / Protest to show powerholders and students that there is a crisis that needs their urgent attention
- Negotiate with powerholders to win concessions and get demands met
- Escalate your tactics!

16

Students have played pivotal roles in the successes of the Civil Rights Movement, the end of the war in Vietnam, the end of U.S. support for dictatorships in Latin America and apartheid in South Africa. Now, America needs us more than ever – we need a popular movement to renew the promise of American democracy and opportunity at home.

Join Students for a Democratic Society, start a chapter, launch a campaign of Student Power for Accessible Education. Change your campus forever. Change your life forever! Change our nation! The future is ours to win!



Why do we demand **STUDENT POWER** for **ACCESSIBLE EDUCATION?**

EDUCATION IS NECESSARY FOR SUCCESS IN AMERICA. SADLY,

the cost of higher education in our country is skyrocketing. The Project on Student Debt recently found that over the past decade, debt levels for graduating seniors with student loans more than doubled. Many young folks are being blocked from college because they can't afford it, while those who graduate often find themselves crushed under a mountain of student debt. At the same time that education is becoming inaccessible, our schools are failing to meet student needs. This is because our classes, curriculums, administration policy, and campus politics are all controlled by people who aren't students!

As a response, Students for a Democratic Society has launched a nationwide campaign, Student Power for Accessible Education, to step-up the fight for affordable and democratic education, and help create a bright future for us all. As students, we realize we have a special role to play in fixing this broken system.

More and more our schools are being run like businesses. University Boards of Trustees, those who hold our Presidents accountable, are often made up of corporate executives. Quality education is increasingly becoming a privilege for the few students who can afford it. Financial aid is not only lacking, but where available it often traps students with high interest-rate loans that may take nearly a lifetime to pay back.

6 Student Power for Accessible Education is a campaign that creates space for students to make our voices clearly heard on our campuses. We refuse to be used.



Some may take more or less time. Each one of these is a real, concrete, wonderful change that will benefit your campus for years – but beyond that, winning these goals will build your organization and your skills as an organizer!

Short Term Goals

- Free printing on campus
- Cheaper textbooks (or online texts)
- Create a student union
- Free debt counseling + services for students
- SDSers winning Student Government positions and pushing a Student Agenda

Long Term Goals

- Financial aid increase / student-worker pay increase
- Create a sexual assault resource center
- Full Budget Transparency
- University divestment from war profiteers
- Halt Tuition Increases (Tuition Freeze)

Once you pick an easy goal (or three), figure out which powerholder can give it to you. It's probably your university president, or the trustees, but often there are a bunch of powerholders you want to target. Our goal is to convince them to give us what we want – so they need to want it too! Kindness, persuasion, teamwork, and genuine personal friendship are always the key to successful campaign victories. Work **WITH** your opponents (hard though it may be) to get what you want.

PLAN to WIN: CAMPAIGN STRATEGY and TACTICS

STRATEGY IS THE PLAN WE MAKE TO ACHIEVE OUR short term and long term goals – a student union, fair tuition, quality

education, peace and social justice.

Students for a Democratic Society has a national strategy to renew democracy in America. We are building chapters around the nation to grow a strong student movement, to win change for our schools and our nation.

Each of our chapters should also have a strategy to grow in strength and win meaningful local change.

Winning change is actually pretty easy! People have been doing it forever – social movements have been kicking ass for hundreds of years. The left and the right have been playing tug-of-war forever, and they both win change with a similar strategy.

First we find the people who have the power to give us our goal. Then, we put pressure on them until we win changes and reforms. We start with a small amount of pressure and we escalate the pressure we put on powerholders until we win a victory. We start by winning small victories but we keep winning until we are strong enough to win big ones.

Here, for example, is a list of short term and long term goals that you can begin to campaign for in your Student Power for Accessible Education Campaign.



We are educating ourselves while working with our administrations and others to build popular support for an educational system that is open to all. We're also working for decision-making power over what we learn and how our classrooms are run. Instead of merely getting trained for future jobs, we believe our schools should be engines that create a brighter future for all Americans.

Save our schools! Launch a Student Power for Accessible Education Campaign with your SDS chapter, and become part of a growing student movement creating meaningful change!

HOW ^{to} BUILD STUDENT POWER

BUILD A CHAPTER!

A chapter is a local group that is teaming up to work with Students for a Democratic Society. SDS has hundreds of chapters at schools and in cities across the country!

We are building as many strong chapters as possible to grow the student movement across the nation. All our chapters are working hard to win meaningful change for their communities. Our national organization provides connections, resources, materials, training, and campaigns to help chapters grow.

To register your chapter, go to www.newsds.org and click “Start a Chapter.”

STARTING A CHAPTER!

So, your school needs some serious reform. Folks are apathetic, tuition's too high, your administration's corrupt, classes suck, the usual. You want to start an SDS chapter to score some changes – but where do you begin?

Starting a group at your school is an exciting and challenging process. We've learned a lot about it so we want to share tips that can make it a lot easier for you. You don't need to reinvent the wheel.

Step One: Create a core of committed organizers to anchor your group.

First, you'll want to get a core group together to do the early planning and take on responsibility for the group's success. These are close friends or others you think will be interested in helping to start an SDS chapter at your school. Personal relationships and friendships make the strongest glue between organizers. Talk to friends and members of other groups about

SDS, about the idea of starting a chapter or turning an existing group into an SDS chapter.

It's helpful to make a list of all the people you want to contact. Try and get a diverse group of people with different backgrounds and expertise. Hold personal one-on-one meetings and get them on board! Be proud and confident of the good work you're doing. Then, meet and call and use facebook and email to get the whole group together for your first meeting!

Raise Funds!

Host creative events to raise money for your group. Poetry readings, concerts, and parties can work great. You may decide to have committed members pay dues, or ask for donations from parents, professors, and other potential donors.

Institutionalize change:

Demand concrete reforms and changes in the laws or statutes of your school. This guarantees that your victories will last, will be meaningful, and that you can build on them to win bigger victories later! With each win, you build more power so you can move on to bigger demands.

Praxis makes perfect!

Praxis is putting theory into action, reflecting upon your actions, reshaping your theory, putting your improved theory into action, and so on and on. Debrief after meetings, actions and campaigns and think critically about what you can do better next time.

Avoid leader-less-ness:

We organize horizontally within SDS, meaning there's no President, Vice President, etc., but don't pretend there aren't leaders! Instead, take responsibility for the group like a good organizer, and try to create an environment where everyone can grow to be a leader together. Hold each other accountable. Share power and build leadership, and don't ever be afraid of getting work done.

Develop more leaders!

Be intentional about developing leadership (skills, confidence, knowledge) in other folks in your group, particularly folks from traditionally marginalized groups (women, people of color, queers). Don't do something alone when you can help someone gain skills and empower them by teaming up!

Plug people in with specific tasks:

Get people involved by asking them to do things. Mass communication is impersonal and doesn't usually work; instead, ask specific people to do specific things that you think they'd be good at. Always ask in person if you can. Start with small, bite-sized things and gradually grow as they increasingly show responsibility. When helping find roles for new folks or building leadership in others, remember that what is just another task to you may be an opportunity for growth for another person. Offer people tasks and projects they're prepared for and are excited about, in order to build their confidence.

Love and Support:

Create a culture of emotional support. LISTEN to other people and be there for each other. Thank folks for work well done, and be conscious and careful about criticism. Be genuine and caring. Build internal bonds by spending time together when you're not doing work. Share meals, play games, go to the park!

Peace in, peace out!

Try not to get too stressed out. Big successes take time, and inevitably will include failures and disappointments along the way. Find healthy ways to cope with emotions, like meditation, exercise, playing music, writing, being in nature, and talking with friends.

Now that you're an organizer,
it's time to get STRATEGIC!

HOT TIPS for ORGANIZERS

WE ARE BUILDING AN ORGANIZATION, AND THAT MAKES YOU AN ORGANIZER. Thank you for making it easier for people to get involved, and for making it easier for your chapter to succeed by keeping things productive and strategic.

The most important thing you can do is keep track of what tasks other group members are working on and follow up with them to make sure they complete their responsibilities!!

Organizing also means figuring out what your group needs and making it happen. It also means building up leadership in yourself and others to make every member in your group a skilled organizer. Organizing takes many different forms, such as strategizing for campaigns, building coalitions and working with other groups, identifying the training needs of your group, recruiting key people into the group, coordinating actions and protests, speaking publicly, etc.

Now that you're an organizer with the student movement, here are some hot tips as you build student power. Special thanks to SDSer Faye Bibeau.

Build Relationships:

Building relationships with people is one of the most basic pieces of organizing. Strive to build friendships with folks who you want to organize with. More than any other reason, people join social movements because they know someone already involved. Network! Befriend your student body president. Don't be shy—invite folks who you'd like to work with to sit down to talk. Engage folks who you wouldn't normally spend time with.

"An Action a Day..."

Action is application of the power you have built through organizing, and it is essential for a group to be successful. Try to always have an action on the horizon. Use actions (rather than meetings) to recruit new members. Be visible. Be creative. Use humor, theater, props, etc. But most of all - be strategic! Check out our section on strategy!

Outreach is a constant process!

Make what you're doing a household word. Pick a simple, effective message and repeat it, everywhere, all over! Be creative. Outreach should be fun and ongoing. Be very conscious of the image that you are projecting and strive to be inclusive and engage a wide range of people. Appeal to the mainstream, get the widest number of people interested in your work. Don't worry about people's politics - focus on the important issues like student debt and student power.



Step Two: Have a planning meeting to begin building your chapter.

Invite folks to a first meeting where you can begin to build your chapter. It would be helpful to decide upon a campaign by the end of this meeting, like, oh let's say... Student Power for Accessible Education! Then you can start recruiting and building student power and winning victories on your campus!

Pass around a sign-up sheet to collect names, e-mails, and numbers. Then, start a Google Group (at groups.google.com) so you can have an e-mail list for meeting announcements and to-do lists.

It's often helpful to have an "announcements" e-mail list, and an "organizers" list. Later, when your group gets bigger, some people will be coming to meetings and doing the

behind-the-scenes organizing work, while others will just be coming out to the parties, events, actions, and other fun stuff. That's ok! Just have the organizing list be the one where you talk to organizers about all the work being done and use the announcements list to reach EVERYONE and let them know when events are happening. Your announcements list should have as many people on it as possible, while the organizers list will only include those who are attending meetings and doing work.

Find out what it takes to start a club at your school, and fill out the appropriate paperwork (or don't, if you don't want to have to follow their rules - keep in mind this option could limit your ability to reserve spaces or get funds from your school). Now that you've gotten started, it's time to grow!

Step Three: Outreach + Recruit Everyone!!

In order to build strong social movements on our campuses and beyond it's crucial to have lots of support and involvement. We need to keep recruiting new people, developing new leadership, and growing our numbers. People are always looking to get involved and feel valuable – it's up to us to give them the opportunity!

Make an initial recruiting plan to grow your group. Hand out fliers and set up a flashy table in high-traffic areas and campus events + activities fairs. Have every member bring in one new friend to an event or party. (Do that often!)

When new members arrive, ensure that they feel welcome, wanted and included. Always explain who you are, the sweet work you do, and when the time is right, ask party-goers and event-attendees to get involved. Always bring a sign-up sheet to everything and collect people's info!

Here are some possible events:

- Student-led debt education workshops
- Banner drops
- Parades
- Movie showings
- Puppet shows
- Teach-ins
- Speak-outs
- Street theater
- Panel discussions
- Art shows

Attend events of other groups and build organizing relationships, make contacts and distribute SDS literature (when appropriate). Make connections based on common interests and offer support before inviting people to join your own group/campaign - it shows respect and dedication to helping others with their work. Also, it's one of the best ways to grow your organization.

Meetings can be boring and unfriendly for new people – so invite recruits to parties and fun events first! Bring them to the meetings when they're ready to take the next step and get involved. Introduce new members into existing social networks and build friendships, since this will keep people attached to your group. Avoid cliques and in-groups.

The most important thing you can do to help a new person develop into a dedicated organizer is to spend one-on-one time with them!! Make sure to ask what they feel excited about, and support their interests. Do lunch or dinner with different members, and listen at least as much as you talk!

Step Four: Have Meetings, Do Work!

Too many campus groups sit around and talk about the issues, but SDS chapters take action to really transform situations. It's important to have productive meetings to plan and prepare to take action.

Meetings should be well-publicized and accessible. Flyers, e-mails over your google group e-mail list, and facebook groups/events are all good reminders for the people you make contact with. But you **MUST** call new people or talk to them in person or they probably won't show up! Meet somewhere public yet intimate and free of distractions. Most campuses allow students or student groups to reserve rooms for meetings.

Assign roles so that meetings stay successful and short:

The **FACILITATOR** is responsible for helping the group reach its goals for the meeting. The facilitator leads the group through the Agenda, moves discussion along, and makes sure conversation is productive. Be aware the dynamics of who's speaking. For example, if men are dominating the discussion, encourage them to notice this and step back in order to create a space for women to talk. Facilitation may seem scary, but it's actually really easy! Just move through the agenda and the group will be thankful for your help!

The **NOTE TAKER** takes notes! It should be someone other than the facilitator. The notes should be e-mailed to members of the "organizers" list as soon as possible, including those who were unable to attend the meeting.

Sometimes a **STACK TAKER** is helpful, especially with large meetings. This person writes down people's names in the order

that they raise their hands, then calls on folks in that order so they speak in turns. Also, if the discussion is being dominated by the same people, the stack taker may take a "weighted stack" which moves people who have not spoken yet to the top of the list, regardless of when they raised their hand.

Set an **AGENDA** to plan your strategy, outreach, actions, etc!

Every meeting should have a clear agenda, set prior to the meeting or at the very beginning, with pre-determined time allotments for each item. The facilitator should ask other members what they'd like to add to the agenda.

A sample agenda might be:

Personal Introductions (10 min)

Introduction to the group + campaign for new members (10 min)

Report back on Tabling for SPFAE Campaign (10 min)

Report back on meeting with Student Government (15 min)

Plan Outreach at upcoming activities fair (15 min)

Plan Action for next week! (25 min)

Next Steps + Unfinished Business? (10 min)

Next meeting - time/date/location and pick facilitator (5 min)

Announcements + Wrap-Up (5 min)

Introductions are important and fun! They help set the energy for the rest of the meeting. If everyone speaks at least a little in the beginning, even about something small, they will be much more likely to contribute during the meeting. You may want to go around in a circle (people should sit in circles whenever possible) and have people say their names, where they're from, and a simple ice-breaker question, such as what change they want to see at their school.

Remember: whenever you decide to do something, make sure someone takes responsibility for making sure it gets done! That's how we hold each other accountable and complete tasks!

Congratulations! You've started a chapter, built a core of committed friends, begun outreach and recruitment, and you're planning to take your school by storm!

Now, that's organizing!