HOW TO
START AND RUN
A STUDENT-LED
GROUP
OVERVIEW

1) Know your purpose
2) Organize a group of founding members
3) Identify an adult mentor
4) Construct your mission
5) Create goals to measure progress
6) Write a proposal to secure approval and resources
7) Establish a time and place to regularly meet
8) Determine organizational structures
9) Discuss and execute activities
10) Continue to engage your community

OBJECTIVE

The task of creating change in a school or community can seem daunting at first, but it is not as hard as it sounds. You will need to break down your problem, develop a team, and tackle your tasks piece-by-piece. That's not to say that it doesn't take a lot of work and commitment, but so do all things that are worth doing! To create an effective student-led group, Oregon Student Voice offers this guide.
1. KNOW YOUR PURPOSE

What is the point of your group? What is your goal? Is the goal to strengthen a school community? Is the goal to make school lunches healthier? It's possible that there may not be a clear mission statement, but it's important to have a solid direction. You should be vague enough that other student voices can add input to the direction of the group, but also specific enough that students understand the bounds of the group they are joining.

2. ORGANIZE A GROUP OF FOUNDING MEMBERS

After defining your purpose, bring together a group of three to six peers who share your conviction and are willing to commit their time to the group. The best way to go about creating your group is to ask peers face-to-face. Connecting with peers on social media can also be a great way to build your group.
3 IDENTIFY AN ADULT MENTOR

Talk to a trusted adult about the goals that you intend to accomplish and ask for their support. A mentor should not be taking over leadership of the group. Instead, try to think of them like a library. They have knowledge that may be helpful, but the students in the group must decide how to use it. When approaching a potential mentor, be sure to clearly outline exactly what you are requesting so that they understand your expectations. There is no way to approach a mentor that isn’t a bit awkward. Be sure to be polite and respectful.

4 CONSTRUCT YOUR MISSION

Your group needs a mission statement to guide your efforts. A mission statement should capture what the end product of your group’s work looks like and how you plan to broadly accomplish this product. A mission statement could look like: “Our mission is to create bonds between our students by bringing students together.” Keep in mind that mission statements should focus on the problem that you wish to address.
CREATE GOALS TO MEASURE PROGRESS

Goals are the steps that need to be reached in order to accomplish your mission, and with every goal, you need a plan. So if your mission is to build a stronger community, a goal of yours could be to host an event with 50 student attendees, which you achieve by mass advertising over social media, posters, and word of mouth. Make sure your goals are SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound) to ensure you are set up for success!

WRITE A PROPOSAL TO SECURE APPROVAL AND RESOURCES

If you want to receive the support of another organization, such as your school or a local community group, you will need to write and submit a proposal to decision makers, e.g. the administrators, for approval. These proposals should include:
(a) who will be involved; (b) who needs to give permission for it to happen; (c) a summary of your work, including your mission and goals; (d) where, when, and how your work will take place, (e) what projected benefits your work will have, and (f) what resources it will take, such as cost.
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ESTABLISH A TIME AND PLACE TO REGULARLY MEET

Students will need to organize a time and place (virtually or physically) where they can regularly meet, preferably at least once a week. If you choose to meet after school, you may have to register as a club. You might also want to consider days where you organize meetings during lunch. You can also consider using online platforms, such as Zoom or Google Hangout, if you want to meet outside school time.

Wherever you meet it needs to be easily accessible to all interested students. Additionally, creating a shared Google Drive or creating a group chat on platforms like Slack can allow people to communicate and organize action after meetings.
Effective groups have clear ways in which they organize, make decisions, and complete tasks. First, you will want to think about who can join your group. Then, you will want to think about how decisions will be made. Examples include: members vote on decisions or leader(s) make the decision. Ensure it is clear to all members how decisions are made in your group. Finally, you will want to think about who will be responsible for tasks.

You may find it helpful to have clear positions for responsibility. These positions can include, but are not limited to: (a) a group leader, who leads and organizes the group; (b) a communications coordinator, who spreads information about the group; and (c) a treasurer, who runs the budget. You will determine positions based on your group’s need, and these positions may change over time.
DISCUSS AND EXECUTE ACTIVITIES

At this point, you will have a solid, committed team, and you will want to start discussing as a group your plans to achieve the mission. Deciding plans of actions can be very difficult and require lots of debate. Google forms are a great way to poll for group ideas. Additionally, separating a large group into smaller committees can help break up large issues into smaller focus areas. When in doubt, research and reach out. You are not alone in trying to make change, and there are lots of great resources out there. Be careful not to let planning get in the way of doing things. The most important thing is to start. Take action, no matter how small.

CONTINUE TO ENGAGE YOUR COMMUNITY

As you make progress towards your mission, do not forget to keep your community updated and engaged in your work. You can do this through social media, a weekly/monthly newsletter, posters, etc. Be sure to use platforms that your community can easily access and use!
The task of starting a student-led group can begin simply with a common mission. Structure and organization add to the power and potential of your group. With this in mind, you have the ability to create a legacy of service and change in your community.

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