

STUDENT ACTIVISM 101:

A quick guide to getting started, getting the word out, finding funding, and fighting for the the change you seek.

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INTRODUCTION

As a result of the growing demand for change in this country, youth are increasing their role in shaping the national debate around issues that are critical to personal freedom and liberties. Young people, including students, are taking to the streets and protesting policy by advocating for their individual rights and beliefs.

In this day and age, activism has never been easier. Protests and assemblies across the country are promoted on multiple social media platforms, petitions are accessible digitally, and both educational and media resources are readily available online. Students can easily find and participate in the activism opportunities that matter to them.

To become an effective student activist, you must not only consider how you want to contribute to your community, but you must also understand your rights. As a student and resident, you are guaranteed certain unalienable rights under the United States Constitution including the freedom of speech & expression, assembly, and the press.

This booklet from the ACLU of Rhode Island will help you to discover how and where to find opportunities as a student activist to advocate for and understand your rights better.

This pamphlet provides general information on student activism and should not be considered legal advice. Be sure to check your school's student handbook for policies that may affect your advocacy and First Amendment rights.

BECOMING A STUDENT ACTIVIST

Whether you want to see change on a global scale or at a local level, your voice is your greatest power. Becoming a student activist involves actively pursuing change and/or reform on an issue that you believe is needed.

There are numerous ways you can choose to become a student activist and to self-advocate. Two potential pathways include:

The Campaign Activist

Campaign activists often focus on a single topic or issue. As a student activist, consider organizing a group to convey a campaign to a target audience.



The Independent Activist

Being an independent activist involves representing yourself at different events to promote your position regarding the issues that are most important to you.

THE CAMPAIGN ACTIVIST

GETTING STARTED

When lobbying for change in your community or in the world, you will need to clearly identify and understand the issue that you intend to address and the creation of a potential campaign strategy.

Don't miss a step!

1. Choose an Issue
2. Outline a Strategy
 - a. Gather resources
 - b. Determine funding sources (if any)
 - c. Identify allies and determine opponents
3. Develop your pitch.

Choosing an Issue

When becoming a student activist, it is critical to identify the issues that are important to you and to your community. When considering issues that you would like to pursue, it is necessary to consider your position and your message.

Outlining a Strategy

When beginning to campaign for change, whether small or large scale, it is important to outline a strategy. First, you must allocate resources, estimate funds and identify allies and opponents. Next, seek out the campaign's target audience and develop your appeal pitch.

ORGANIZING A GROUP & FACILITATING MEETINGS

After choosing your issue and outlining a strategy, it is helpful to organize a group or a community of likeminded people with whom you can advocate.

Creating Group Structure/Organization

While groups can have leaders, many grassroots movements prefer a leadership-less model for their groups. If this is your preferred method, then work to create a model of collaboration between the members that will move you closer to your intended goal.

Holding Meetings

After you have determined the model of group leadership you like, get things started by holding a meeting. During your meetings you may want to have members break into smaller subgroups or committees. Both are effective ways to delegate work.



SPREADING THE WORD & FUNDRAISING

Getting your campaign's message out to others helps communicate your goals, introduce others to your group, and grow your potential donor base. Spreading the

word can easily be done through flyers and posters, as well as through social media and the internet. By spreading the word, you will engage others and alert them of potential actions in the future.

Speaking of social media and the internet, these are both effective ways to do grassroots fundraising for your cause. GoFundMe campaigns and Facebook fundraisers are just a few ways. You can also try other methods like bake sales or sales of merchandise, like buttons, stickers, or t-shirts .

TAKING ACTION

After you've done the behind the scenes work with your group, it's time to take direct action. There are many different ways to take direct action, but just remember that the function of direct action is to engage the public with the purpose of educating others and reinforcing your goal.

Developing an Action

When running a successful campaign, it is necessary to discuss what is the most effective action your group can take. It is important to brainstorm action ideas with your group while discussing that some actions, while legal, may still lead to police involvement and possible arrest.

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Some of the most effective actions are creative and protected by the Constitution. There are many non-violent actions that your group can engage in, including: sit-ins, boycotts, protests, rallies, social media campaigns, and more.

Holding Your Action

When you hold your action, it is important to remember your goal and keep your target in mind. Your goal is always to engage your audience to ultimately persuade them to advocate for the change you want to see. By developing your action and seeing it through, you will be a step closer to seeing the positive change you have been advocating for.

THE INDEPENDENT ACTIVIST

GETTING STARTED

Similar to the “Campaign Activist” approach, as a student activist using the “Independent Activist” approach, you must understand your motives and goals. It is important to advocate for something that is important to you.

Choosing Issues

When becoming a student activist, especially if you are self-advocating, it is critical to find issues that are important to you and the community. When finding issues that you would like to pursue, it is necessary to consider your message, your stance, and why you are so passionate about it. Understanding why it is so important to you is the first step to communicating that to others.

Educating Yourself

Whether you are sticking to one or many different issues, it is critical to take the necessary steps in educating yourself. Before advocating for a particular issue, educate yourself by reading articles, watching news programs, listening to podcasts, and talking with others. You should try to understand all positions to fully understand your own stance.

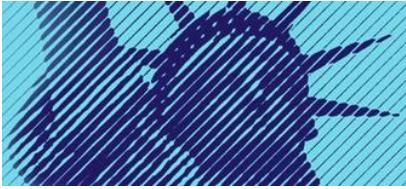
DISCOVERING OPPORTUNITIES AND TAKING ACTION

After you have chosen and educated yourself on issues, it is time to find opportunities to take action. There are numerous ways to get involved to foster positive change in your community.

Discovering Opportunities

As a student activist, you can start advocating for your beliefs by attending protests and rallies, joining pre-existing programs, signing petitions, and more. Events and opportunities are often publicized online and are easily accessible for you to find and attend.





American Civil Liberties Union

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) has different affiliates across the country with various opportunities to become involved.

Local affiliates of the ACLU are great ways for you to learn about local initiatives happening where you live that affect how your city, town or state do things. They are also places where you can volunteer your time helping educate the public about current campaigns. You can visit the National ACLU website to learn about the work and campaigns that are happening at the national level.

Information on how to find the National ACLU's website and how to contact and become involved with the ACLU of RI can be found at the end of this handbook.

FINAL THOUGHTS

This handbook is a beginning step in starting your advocacy journey. There are a lot of helpful educational tools that you should review if you have additional questions. As a reminder, you should always review your school's student handbook for policies that pertain to any action you would like to take.

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS: FIRST AMENDMENT

To successfully advocate for your community and the issues that are important to you, it is useful to have a solid understanding of your First Amendment Rights guaranteed to you under the U.S. Constitution. To help with this, the ACLU of RI has a booklet on students and the First Amendment, as well as other pamphlets on Students' Rights, available here: <https://www.riaclu.org/know-your-rights>.

GET IN TOUCH

Still have questions? Want to get more information on volunteering with the ACLU of RI? Interested in learning about advocacy campaigns at both the state and federal level? Visit the ACLU of RI's website for more information, or find us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram by searching for RIACLU.

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ACLU

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