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COMPREHENSIVE MANUAL FOR STATE FEDERATIONS

COLLEGE DEMOCRATS OF AMERICA

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Introduction

Welcome to the College Democrats of America! We are the official collegiate arm of the Democratic National Committee, and have over 100,000 members at schools across the USA. Our mission is to organize college students who are passionate about progressive politics, to help elected Democratic candidates, increase youth voter turnout, and advocate for policies that affect our lives. State Federations are the core of our organization, and this manual was put together to help students start, charter and run a state federation of College Democrats.

State Federations are the building blocks of the College Democrats of America, and they serve many crucial functions. These include building College Democrat membership by reaching out to unorganized colleges and universities, organizing and mobilizing student chapters to support the state Democratic Party, and creating a network through which campus chapters can work together. If your state does not have a state federation, this guide will explain how to write a constitution, form an exec board, connect with your state party and charter with the College Democrats of America.

Let's get to work!

The College Democrats of America

Getting Started

Getting Started

Building a state federation can seem daunting, but don't be intimidated! There are plenty of people and organizations who can help you along the way. Once you have decided you are interested in starting a state federation, the first step is to begin reaching out to existing College Democrat organizations at schools around the state, through social media, email, and any other means. Some chapters will be more active than others, and some will be more responsive than others. But once you have made contact with a few chapters, set up a meeting, either in person or over Zoom, where you can talk more about starting a state federation. Once you have a group of people who are interested, start reaching out to other organizations who can help you get started, including the College Democrats of America, and your state Democratic Party. These organizations will likely have people and resources who can help with the rest of the process.

Steps

1. Talk to friends and political clubs at your school about starting a state federation of college Democrats
2. Begin reaching out to college Democrats clubs at other schools
3. Set up a meeting of chapter leaders to discuss forming a state federation
4. Reach out to other political organizations, including the College Democrats of America, neighboring state federations, and your state Democratic Party

Writing a Constitution

How to Write a Constitution

One of the most important parts of starting a state federation is writing a constitution that will give your organization a strong foundation. Once you have a group of college Democrats chapters who are interested in starting a state federation, the next step is to write a constitution. To do so, you will need to establish a clear process for how to draft, review, and ratify the constitution. It is important to note that because every state is different, every state federation and thus every constitution will be different. However, there are important lessons that can be learned from how other states structure and run their organizations. Hopefully by this point in the process you will be in contact with other state federations, and can talk with them about what to include. Even if not, most states have their constitutions online, and you can look to them for guidance.

Steps

1. Establish a clear process for how to draft, review, and ratify your constitution, ideally with regular meetings of a constitutional committee
2. Reach out to other state federations for guidance and advice
3. Ensure that your constitution is in accordance with any requirements from outside organizations, like your state Democratic Party, which you want to join

What to Include in a Constitution

Every constitution will be different, but there are some sections they should all have, including:

A Preamble

Like the Preamble of the US Constitution, this should be a short statement laying out the purpose and mission of the state federation

Executive Board

More information on this later, but there should be a section clearly outlining the roles, structure, elections and terms of the executive board, including how to remove a member, if necessary.

State Council

Most state federations consist of an executive board and a body representing the different school chapters, and potentially identity caucuses. Your constitution should clearly lay out this structure, including meetings, membership and voting procedure.

Membership

Your constitution should clearly lay out the rules governing membership, how a chapter can join the state federation, and how your state federation can join other organizations.

Endorsements

Your constitution should make it clear how, and in what circumstances, the state federation will endorse a candidate or piece of legislation.

Amendments

Your constitution should clearly lay out the amendment process, so any necessary changes can be made in the future.

Exec Board

Building an Exec Board

The success of your state federation will hinge, in large part, on how well the exec board is able to function. Because of this, it is important to structure an exec board that is properly suited to the unique needs of your organization, and ensure that the right people are chosen for it. Ideally, an exec board should be elected by members of the state federation.

However, this might not be possible with the first exec board, when the state federation is being founded. Your constitution should make it very clear what the roles and responsibilities of the exec board are, how they will be elected or appointed, and what will happen in the event of a vacancy.

Running an Exec Board

Your state federation's exec board should meet regularly, and have strong communication and responsiveness. Everyone will need to know the projects and assignments they have to work on, and how to get them done.

Exec Board Positions

While every state is different and may require different exec board officers, here is a list of some common ones:

- President/Vice President
- Financial Director
- Communications Director
- Membership Director
- Political Director
- Chief of Staff
- DEI Director
- Regional Directors
- Special Project Director (appointed as needed)

Chartering with the CDA

Chartering with the CDA

Chartering with the College Democrats of America will allow your state federation to access CDA resources, participate in CDA events, and coordinate with other CDA members. The College Democrats of America is the official collegiate arm of the Democratic National Committee, and chartering with us has the following requirements:

Requirements to Charter:

- Create a state Executive Board with at least four members
- Create a governing document (constitution or bylaws)
- Have/form at least one College Democrats chapter at a school in your state

Chartering Process

Chartering Process:

- Create a document with the following information:
 - Roster of state Executive Board members, including:
 - Name
 - Title
 - Phone Number
 - Email
 - School
 - Classification
 - Governing documents
 - Roster of chartered chapters, including:
 - Name of chapter president (or highest officer)
 - Phone Number
 - Email
 - School
 - Classification
- Identify four members of your State Federation to represent your state at the National Council (only one member can vote at meetings)
- Reach out to the CDA Director of Membership at membership@collegedemocratsofamerica.com with the completed document
- Once approved by the Membership Director, attend the next National Council meeting for a vote on your state chartering with the CDA
- Contact you state Democratic Party and Young Democrats, along with any other organizations you have worked with, to let them know your new status

College Chapters

College Chapters

Your state federation's college chapters will vary widely in membership, size, engagement and activity- it will be your job, as a state federation, to run an organization that can unite them all effectively. In order to do so, it is important to understand the differences of each chapter, and structure your organization accordingly. Some chapters may receive a lot of funding from their school, others may not. Some will be in urban areas, and will have an easy time travelling to other schools or nearby events. Others will be much more spread out. It is imperative to build a strong, statewide communications network, to ensure that all chapters are cooperating and communicating.

Founding New Chapters

One of the most important roles of a state federation is to found new chapters at schools that do not have existing college Democrat organizations. Depending on the situation, some states will aim to found 5 to 10 new chapters a year. Founding a chapter will vary by school, depending on the school's requirements for political clubs. For each new chapter, however, the challenge will be to find interested students on campus. If you know people at the school, try reaching out to them, or reach out to other progressive organizations if they have chapters on campus. Additionally, you can email faculty in a school's political science department, to see if they can reach out to their students, or email a college's Student Government. You may encounter resistance at some schools to having a progressive organization, or any political organization at all, on campus. To deal with this, your constitution should stipulate how to charter a chapter that is not officially recognized by the school.

Engaging Members

Engaging Members

Beyond founding and incorporating student organizations, your challenge as a state federation will be to keep your membership engaged, through ongoing programs and other means. It is also especially important to ensure there is strong leadership development among younger members of the state federation, in order to ensure a strong future for the organization.

Tips for Engaging Members

- Try to build personal relationships between the exec board and college chapters
- Host state-wide and inter-chapter events whenever possible. In some areas, where chapters are spread out and travel is difficult, this can be a challenge. In this case, virtual events, including virtual town halls or speaker events can help engage members across the state
- Maintain an active social media presence
- Focus on what you can offer members as a state federation- larger events, internship opportunities, contact with the state party, etc.
- Keep up-to-date as an exec board on the functionings of college chapters, and offer resources as needed
- Recognize the unique nature of your state, and of each college chapter, and plan accordingly

Raising and Spending Money

Raising and Spending Money

In order to run a state federation effectively, it is not only important to raise money, but also to spend it effectively. Some college chapters will be well-funded by their school administration, others may require funding from the state federation. Either way, there are many things the exec board will have to spend money on, including campaigning, resources, statewide events, travel, and other operations. You will need to set up a bank account for your organization, and register your organization as a PAC, or nonprofit. How you choose to register your organization will depend on the unique nature of your state federation, but it is vital to ensure that your state federation is in accordance with all applicable campaign finance laws, and is able to collect money. For this, it is important to reach out to your state party- they will have experience with financial management, and can help you out.

Ways to Raise Money

- Reach out to large Democratic donors in your state and the state Democratic party
- Reach out to candidates, issue campaigns and labor unions- remember, it will be important to explain *why* you are asking for money, and what their money will be put towards
- Reach out to potential small-dollar donors via email or phone calls. Have a polished pitch, and explain to them what their money will go toward
- Host fundraisers with campaigns, candidates and other organizations. These can include candidate forums, where campaigns pay the state federation to participate in a forum of college students
- Sell merchandise for your state federation at an online store- note this can be tricky, and requires a lot of logistical planning

Building a Communications Network

Building a Communications Network

Strong communication is absolutely indispensable for any state federation. You will have to coordinate a number of complicated tasks, among a number of different entities, many of whom may never be able to meet in-person. Running a state federation will require organized communication, responsiveness, and coordination, across many different mediums. Email is still the best way to conduct official business, including reaching out to your state party, and elected officials. But it is also vital to communicate via phone, text, and video calls.

Tips for Communications Networks

- Maintain an active list of the contact information for every chapter's leadership and every member of the exec board
- Put effort into cultivating personal relationships across the organization, especially for people who are unable to meet in person
- Schedule regular, recurring meetings for your exec board and state council
- Set clear, realistic expectations for communication and responsiveness
- Use social media to advertise and create online spaces for your organization, but direct communication via email, phone or text is best whenever possible
- Handle official business, including reaching out to other candidates or organizations via email, initially. Provide phone numbers as an alternate means of communication
- Have a dedicated email account for your state federation, and check it regularly
- Ensure that all passwords and login information for your state federation accounts are well documented, and passed down from one exec board to the next

Events

Events

Hosting regular, meaningful events is crucial to maintaining a strong, engaged membership base. These events can (and should) take many forms, from campaign events and fundraisers to social events.

Depending on your state federation's capabilities, you may or may not be able to organize large-scale, in-person events, but either way, it is important to ensure that you are keeping your members engaged.

Types of Events

- Campaigning (canvassing, phone-banking, letter writing)
- Guest speakers, town halls and candidate forums
- Volunteering (in-person or virtual)
- Fundraisers (galas, dinners, parties)
- Social Events (trips, parties, in-person or virtual watch-parties and game nights)
- Lobbying days
- Issue-based events with interest groups
- Conventions

Conventions

Statewide Conventions

One of the best events a state federation can host is a state convention- a chance to bring people together from across the state, where people from different chapters can meet, share ideas, participate in trainings and hear from important state officials. State conventions are also a good time to have elections to choose a new exec board. Conventions take a lot of work and a lot of funding, so new state federations may be unable to host them for a few years. If this is the case, a virtual convention might be a good option.

Programming for a State Convention

- Campaign or chapter-building trainings
- Guest speakers
- Issue roundtables with influential members of the party
- Campaign fairs to connect students with national, state, or local campaigns
- Opportunities for students to network and have fun
- Opportunities for student leaders to discuss state federation action plans for the coming year
- Lobbying
- Officer speeches and elections
- Any other general state federation business.

Relationships With Other Organizations

The College Democrats of America

Chartering with the College Democrats of America is incredibly important, because it will help coordinate action to support the Democratic party nationwide. Your state federation can receive funding and support from the national level, and connections to other important organizations. As a member of the CDA, it is important that your state federation is in regular contact with your Regional Director, and attends National Council Meetings. In addition, the CDA has several Identity Caucuses that your members will be able to join.

State Parties and Elected Officials

It is also incredibly important for your state federation to maintain a strong relationship with your state party, and elected officials. They will be able to provide you with resources, support, and opportunities for your members. It is vital, therefore, that you reach out to them, and build strong ties between your organizations. Remember- you have a lot to offer them! The Democratic party and Democratic candidates need your help engaging college students and organizing volunteers. State federations make this possible.

Other Organizations

There are many other organizations that your state federation can reach out to. Issue campaigns, labor unions, civil rights organizations and environmental groups are just some of the groups that your state federation should strive to have a strong relationship with. As with the state party, these groups can provide you with resources and ways to get involved.

Conclusion

We hope that this guide will serve you well in starting and running a state federation. While this guide is not exhaustive, and the specific circumstances of your state federation will always vary, we will be here to help. State federations like yours are the backbone of our organization, and serve an invaluable purpose. It is incredibly important for young people to get involved in politics, and it is our hope that you will join us in the College Democrats of America, to build a better future for our generation, and all generations to come.

Sincerely,

The College Democrats of America

