



SECULAR STUDENT ALLIANCE

group running guide

3rd edition



**SECULAR
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group running guide

3rd Edition

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The SSA is a 501(c)(3) educational nonprofit corporation. We are a democratic membership organization. Please contact us or visit our web site for information on joining.

To Deidre, Clark, and Krista:
we miss you.

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It is impossible to thank all others individually, but a few people do need special thanks.

The Institute for Humanist Studies and Stiefel Freethought Foundation deserve our sincerest regards. They have both been powerful supporters of the SSA for years and we would simply not be where we are today without them. Please visit the web Institute for Humanist Studies at [\[www.humaniststudies.org\]](http://www.humaniststudies.org) and the Stiefel Freethought Foundation at [\[www.stiefelfreethoughtfoundation.org\]](http://www.stiefelfreethoughtfoundation.org) and let them know how much you appreciate their support of the Secular Student Alliance.

Brian Underwood stands out for his help in putting together the photos for this manual. We had no intention of focusing on Brian or even Students For Freethought at The Ohio State University, but he somehow managed to show up in around half the pictures. The fact that Brian is present in so many pictures is a testament to his hard work in this movement. He has served and led SFF since his freshman year (though he has since graduated) and has given hundreds of hours to the SSA developing all kinds of online resources for the student movement. He is one of the hardest-working men in freethought. Hats off, Brian!

We received many photos from “Humanist Dan” and Bill Bishop, so a special thanks to them.

Thanks go as well to Jennifer Hancock, Mary Ellen Sikes, Charlie Lopez, Paul Youk, Michael Valle, Mike Fox, Andrew Lyman-Buttler and all the other leaders that helped with this guide.

Message from SSA Executive Director August E. Brunzman IV

Dear Future Leaders,

If you attend a high school, university, college, technical college or community college, you can start and successfully maintain a secular student group on your campus. The Secular Student Alliance stands ready to assist you in making your group effective, well run, exciting, and fun.

You and your peers will be the next generation's leaders. You have the opportunity to create a future where democracy, scientific rationality, secularism, and human-based ethics flourish.

Strong, well-rounded groups need to excel at education, activism, service and building a strong community. By blending these four aspects together, your group will truly thrive.

This group running guide is a tool to augment your creativity and ingenuity, as well as your desire to make your secular student group both a short- and long-term success. It was written almost wholly by people who have run campus groups themselves. If you run a group and have ideas on how to improve this book, please let us know!

In love and reason,



August E. Brunzman IV
Executive Director
august@secularstudents.org



The Secular Student Movement

The need for a secular student movement has never been greater. Secular students, whether self-described as atheists, skeptics, freethinkers, agnostics, brights, humanists, nontheists, or something else, wake up each day and face a world heavily influenced by religious fanaticism, ignorance and superstition. Examples are plentiful:

- According to a 1999 Gallup poll, 47% of Americans believe that human beings were created in their present form within the last ten thousand years.
- In 2003, U.S. General Boykin spoke to several churches, sometimes in uniform, saying that in the war on terrorism “the enemy is a guy named Satan,” and clearly painted the U.S.’s conflicts at the time as Christianity vs. Islam. Boykin’s remarks hit the press in October 2003, when he was in charge of tracking down and eliminating Osama bin Laden and Saddam Hussein, and held the position of deputy undersecretary of Defense for intelligence.
- In 2003, the University of Minnesota’s American Mosaic Project Survey found that 39.6% of people surveyed list atheists as a group that does not at all agree with their vision for American society. The survey also found that 47.6% of people surveyed would disapprove if their child wanted to marry an atheist. Overall, the survey found that atheists were by far the least trusted group in American society compared to Muslims, homosexuals, conservative Christians, recent immigrants, Hispanics, Jews, and white Americans.
- In December of 2003, Senator Joe Lieberman said that some people “... forget that the constitutional separation of church and state, which I strongly support, promises freedom of religion, not freedom from religion.”
- In March of 2004, George W. Bush addressed the conference of the National Association of Evangelicals. He thanked them and their 30 million members on behalf of the country for doing God’s work. On the back of the program for the conference was printed “What Can 30 Million Evangelicals Do For America? Anything We Want.”
- A 2006 survey by The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life asked, “What is your religious preference?” and 11% responded, “No religion, not a believer, atheist, agnostic.” In this survey 56% responded as Protestant and 23% as Roman Catholics. The other categories -- Jewish, Mormon, Orthodox Church (Greek or Russian), Islam/Muslim, and Other Religions -- totaled just 8%. These results are similar to those of a BBC survey that determined there are more atheists and agnostics than there are Jews, Presbyterians, Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, and Roman and Greek Orthodox combined in the United States.
- Gallup regularly polls U.S. voters on how minority status influences voting. In 2007, when asked if they would vote for an otherwise qualified atheist candidate of their party, only 45% said yes. This score is fully ten percentage points lower than the score an otherwise qualified homosexual received, and even further below the scores women, blacks, Jews, Catholics, Baptists and Mormons received. In fact, no minority scored lower than atheists.
- In 2008, the Pope declared seven new deadly sins dealing mainly with bioethics and pollution. The man in charge of examining confessions for the Vatican, Monsignor Gianfranco Girotti, stated that, “You offend god... [by] carrying out morally debatable scientific experiments, or allowing genetic manipulations which alter DNA or compromise embryos.”

We at the Secular Student Alliance would like to see all of this change. The underlying purpose of the Secular Student Alliance is to bring about a society in which the ideals of scientific rationality, secularism, democracy, and human-based ethics flourish. Whereas many other organizations already exist to spread these values to adult populations, the SSA focuses on fostering these values among high school and college students. Our specific mission is to organize, unite, educate and serve students and student communities that promote these ideals. We are a national, democratic, membership organization. We provide:

- Logistical support to students who wish to start affiliate groups at their college or high school
- A community of like-minded young adults
- A vehicle for promoting secularism and humanistic values to young people
- A bridge leading to opportunities in the national secular movement

Student leaders like you founded the SSA in 2000. It is a youthful, independent organization with connections to veterans in the movement, such as the American Humanist Association, Atheist Alliance International, Secular Coalition for America, and many others. The members of the SSA believe that by educating our communities and ourselves we can make a better society — a society focused on reason, science, and human-based ethics.

In an article in the Spring 2009 *New Directions for Student Services*, authors Kathleen M. Goodman & John A. Mueller write that “Atheist students are often marginalized by higher education professionals, knowingly or unknowingly, to the point of being made to feel invisible on college campuses.” They go on to suggest multiple ways of supporting atheists on campus, including encouraging the formation of atheist student organizations. The article, an invaluable resource for any student working to start a group on campus, is entitled “Invisible, Marginalized, and Stigmatized: Understanding and Addressing the Needs of Atheist Students,” and is available online at [www.interscience.wiley.com].

Chapter 1:

The SSA

Chapter 1
Section Spotlight:
General Info
How SSA Helps Groups

All of the **links** in this guide
can be found **online** at
[www.secularstudents.org/grglinks]



Students and non-students alike hobnob at the American Humanist Association 2009 Conference.

Section 1 | General Info

About SSA

The mission of the Secular Student Alliance is to organize, unite, educate, and serve students and student communities that promote the ideals of scientific and critical inquiry, democracy, secularism, and human-based ethics. We envision a future in which nontheistic students are respected voices in public discourse and vital partners in the secular movement's charge against irrationality and dogma.

The Secular Student Alliance is a 501(c)3 educational nonprofit. We work to organize and empower nonreligious students around the country. Our primary goal is to foster successful grassroots campus groups which provide a welcoming community for secular students to discuss their views and promote their secular values. Though our office is based in Columbus, Ohio and our affiliated campus groups are predominantly in the United States, we do support affiliates around the world.

We support our affiliates in a variety of ways, including supplying literature and outreach supplies, group-running guides, hands-on assistance, discounted access to prominent speakers, and monetary project grants.

For individual students, we cooperate with other national nontheistic organizations to get discounted student rates for large events and provide travel grants to help the students attend. We hold regional summits and a national conference each year to give students leadership training and the opportunity to network and problem-solve with their peers.

The Secular Student Alliance devotes the majority of its resources to supporting its affiliate groups. We only offer this support to groups that further our mission. We have developed a set of standards to help campus groups determine if they should seek affiliation with us.

We invite campus groups to affiliate with us if they share our values of naturalism, reason and compassion in the service of making the world a better place for all humanity. They must share a philosophical worldview informed by the methods of science, recognize the evolution of our knowledge, and be free from dogma and open to revision as new evidence and more compelling reasons are presented.

We embrace the common goals and shared aspects of all naturalistic, secular worldviews. Secular Student Alliance affiliates include, but are not limited to, atheists, agnostics, humanists, freethinkers, skeptics, naturalists, brights, Pastafarians, and many others.

Specifically, we are interested in affiliating with groups that are:

Naturalistic - We hold that natural things are the only things about which humans can coherently communicate or think. Most of us believe that all things that exist are natural things. We also believe that critical inquiry, combined with empirical investigation where possible, leads to a more accurate understanding of the world in which we live than revelation, faith, or authority.

Economically Neutral - We share many common concerns with organizations that advocate specific economic principles, including Libertarians, Objectivists, Greens, and others. However, we cannot affiliate with groups that pursue an active economic agenda, be it on the left or right. We do acknowledge that the study of economics and sound economic policy is vital to the betterment of humanity. However, we have no interest in endorsing one economic view over others. We strive to see naturalism, reason and compassion take center stage in economic discussions and encourage our affiliates to promote discussion of economic issues.

Civil Rights-Minded - We cannot support groups that promote denial of liberties in areas such as religion, speech, or equality under the law.

Non-discriminatory - We cannot affiliate with groups that bar members from joining on the basis of their creed or worldview. We also cannot affiliate with groups that discriminate on the basis of race, color, sexual orientation, national origin, sex, age, handicap, or veteran status.

Note that these standards apply only to groups that wish to officially affiliate with us. We are open to cooperation on an ad-hoc basis with other organizations - regardless of their worldview - on specific issues of common concern. Additionally, individuals of any worldview are welcome to join the SSA if they wish to support our mission.

Five Focus Areas

These areas guide the way SSA and its affiliates operate. Specifically, they represent most of what our student groups choose to do with their time. To meet the needs of your group and your community, you may engage more in some areas than others.

Education

Our affiliates endeavor to educate themselves and their communities about our world, secular worldviews and issues that affect their members and communities. From hosting speakers on a wide variety of topics to debates, dialogues with other campus groups, outreach activities and awareness campaigns, Secular Student Alliance affiliates contribute to the marketplace of ideas of their campus.

Service

As ethical nontheists interested in the betterment of the human condition, our affiliates engage in service as an important and significant way to make a positive impact on our world. Engaging in service is also a way to build relationships between group members and with members of cooperating groups, and helps demonstrate that nonbelievers can in fact be good without any gods.

Activism

Our affiliates stand up for the issues they believe in, from church-state separation to a wide range of causes that affect their members and communities. Letters to the editor, protests and demonstrations, and participation in rallies are all ways in which SSA affiliates make their voices heard.

Community

Campus groups provide a haven for secular students to find companionship and belonging, to connect with and be affirmed by a community of like-minded individuals. Facilitating community building between members and beyond helps a campus group stay together and continue to grow. Even events like game nights and pub crawls are valuable when the element of community is concerned.

Cooperation

We think it is important for our affiliates to constructively engage with one another, with groups with similar values and with groups of differing worldviews. Cooperation can promote understanding and respect between theists and nontheists, develop coalitions with natural allies, and lead to mutually beneficial relationships with off-campus secular groups.

Section 2 | How SSA Helps Groups

Services & Resources for Affiliates

The SSA provides a considerable number of services and resources to its affiliates. Indeed, providing these services is the primary work of our staff. Look over this list from time to time to make sure your group is taking advantage of everything we offer. Links to many of the services and resources listed below can be found on our website. Let us know if there are other services you would like. We are always looking for ways to serve our affiliates better!

If your group is not yet affiliated with the SSA, apply online using our affiliation form. If you need more information, or are affiliated and interested in taking advantage of any of these services, send us an email at [ssa@secularstudents.org], or call us at {614.441.9588}. Many of the resources listed below are available in expanded formats on our website.

Services & Resources Online
[www.secularstudents.org/services]

Group Affiliation Application
[www.secularstudents.org/affiliate]

Hands-On Help

Campus Organizer

Our Campus Organizing team can help connect your group to services and resources as well as offer one-on-one help when your group is facing challenges. A campus organizer is the person to contact about:

- *Starting a group at your school or university
- *Obstruction, resistance or discrimination from your school or university
- *Getting ideas for an event
- *Solving problems with your group
- *Sharing a great event with other student groups
- *Questions about any of the SSA's services

Media Relations

The Secular Student Alliance's Communications Director can help your group interact with the media, both local and national. We can help give advice and assistance with writing press releases, letters to the editor, speaking to reporters and more.

Branded Affiliate Program

Change your group's name to "Secular Student Alliance at Your Campus" and help support the entire secular student movement. Plus, you get a free logo and any branded swag we have at the SSA office.

Hands-On Help

Campus Organizer
[organizer@secularstudents.org]

Media Relations
[www.secularstudents.org/mediarelations]

Branded Affiliate Program
[www.secularstudents.org/brandedaffiliates]

Services

Speakers

We work with lots of prominent and lesser-known (but still awesome) freethought speakers to speak for free or at discounted rates. We also offer funding to offset the cost of their travel and lodging.

Project Grants

The SSA can give your group money! Every semester there is at least \$1500 available to help students offset the costs of operation, projects, conferences, bringing in speakers, and more.

Business Cards

We are happy to provide business cards with your group's name and contact information on them.

Tabling Supplies

We offer many different types of supplies such as pens, stickers, banners, and more. We also offer brochures from national organizations and our "What is an Atheist?" brochure.

The Best Awards

The Best Awards reward groups that have excelled in one of several specific areas throughout an entire academic year. Winning groups receive a handsome plaque and a cash prize of \$300-\$500.

Email & Web Forwards

The SSA can provide an email address that forwards to a private email, allowing you to publish an email contact for your group without making personal contact information public. We can also create a short, memorable URL for your group that links or auto-redirects to your Facebook group and other contact information.

Services

Speakers
[www.secularstudents.org/speakers]

Project Grants
[www.secularstudents.org/grants]

Business Cards
[www.secularstudents.org/businesscards]

Tabling Supplies
[www.secularstudents.org/tablingsupplies]

The Best Awards
[www.secularstudents.org/best]

Email & Web Forwards
[www.secularstudents.org/forwards]

Resources

Group Running Guide

Lucky for you, you are reading out of a Group Running Guide right now, which probably means that you are mobilizing a group or are in one of SSA's existing affiliates. This booklet contains information detailing how to start a group, find an advisor, raise funds, gain members, run meetings, participate in outreach services, and much more. Also available online!

Group Running Library

In addition to our Group Running Guide, we also have documentation on many other facets of running and maintaining your group in the Group Running Library. Resources include the following and many more:

- *Sample Constitution
- *Sample Year
- *Succession Planning
- *Problem Solving

Facebook LeaderSpace

This is a space for communicating and interacting with fellow group leaders from around the country. Get involved and share ideas, comments, and concerns.

Flyer Exchange

The SSA hosts flyers and promotional materials used by our affiliate groups on our Flyer Exchange. It is a great resource if you need ideas for flyers or would like to submit your group's designs for others to see.

eMpirical

The SSA produces an electronic newsletter, the *eMpirical*, which is published on our website. It often has lots of ideas on how to run your group better.

Activity Packets

In addition to the resources in the Group Running Guide and the Document Library, we have several specific packets that outline how to successfully implement different types of activities and events. These packets simplify and list the steps and supplies needed for these activities.

Speaker Planning Checklist

We've designed this resource to help walk you through planning your speaker event – whether it's your first event or 100th, a campus professor or Richard Dawkins.

List of Discussion Topics

Having a discussion meeting, but not sure what to talk about? Try our list of discussion topics - and send yours in to be added to the list!

Leadership Events

National Conference

The SSA holds an annual national conference geared specifically toward secular students. Participants exchange best practices, get inspired, and connect with the larger secular movement.

Regional Leadership Summits

In addition to our annual conference, we hold regional leadership summits several times per year. These "mini-conferences" have all the benefits of the national conference but are often less expensive and held in different locations to make them more accessible to students in all parts of the country.

Audio Archives

The SSA has an archive on our website of speakers' lectures from our conferences through 2008.

YouTube Channel

We post videos of the presentations from our conferences and leadership summits since 2009, as well as special events held by our affiliates.

Resources

- Group Running Guide Online
[www.secularstudents.org/grouprunningguide]
- Group Running Library
[www.secularstudents.org/library]
- Facebook Leaderspace
[www.secularstudents.org/leaderspace]
- Flyer Exchange
[www.secularstudents.org/exchange]
- eMpirical
[www.secularstudents.org/enews]
- Activity Packets
[www.secularstudents.org/activitypackets]
- Speaker Planning Checklist
[www.secularstudents.org/speakerchecklist]
- List of Discussion Topics
[www.secularstudents.org/discussiontopics]

Leadership Events

- National Conference & Leadership Summits
[www.secularstudents.org/conference]
- Audio Archives
[www.secularstudents.org/node/102]
- YouTube Channel
[www.youtube.com/secularstudents]

Other Benefits of Affiliation

Community

One of the most crucial aspects of our work is fostering a network for secular groups across the nation. We know too well that like-minded people are often few and far between. This is probably one of the reasons your group has come together and it is why we offer tools for existing groups to keep in touch and learn from one another. You can further develop this sense of kinship by becoming part of our online community and by forming relationships with other secular groups.

National Recognition

The SSA is a nationally recognized organization, and growing! By becoming one of our affiliates you get access to all of the resources and services listed above, and if you choose to use the SSA name for your group you instantly tap into our recognition and credibility. The SSA is also well-positioned to point student groups in the right direction for cooperating and interfacing with our many partner organizations.

Individual Membership

The Secular Student Alliance is a democratic membership organization. **Anyone, student or non-student, is welcome to join.** Members of the SSA are eligible to vote in elections for our Board of Directors and changes to our bylaws. Additionally, all members are eligible to run for the Secular Student Alliance Board of Directors.

Because the Secular Student Alliance is a 501(c)(3) educational non-profit, **your membership dues are tax deductible.** Individual membership is different from affiliating your campus group (which is free).

Become an SSA member
[www.secularstudents.org/join]



Students from the Northern Illinois University Atheists, Agnostics, and Freethinkers, an affiliate of the Secular Student Alliance.

Chapter 2:

Getting Started

Chapter 2
Section Spotlight:
Mission & Vision
Faculty Advisor
Leadership
Group Name
Legitimizing & Bylaws

All of the **links** in this guide
can be found **online** at
[www.secularstudents.org/grglinks]



The Campus, Atheists, Skeptics, and Humanists at the University of Minnesota painting a panel on a bridge at their school, one great way to get your new group noticed.

Section 1 | Mission & Vision

When thinking about starting your own campus group, write down what you want to accomplish and the main purpose of your group. This will help when responding to inquiries from interested students and staff, and provide direction when thinking about the types of meetings and events you want to hold. You may think the answer to this question is obvious, but different people may imagine different “obvious” answers. A written statement of purpose ensures that everyone knows what the group’s aim is.

The first question you need to ask yourself is: “Why do you want to start a group?” You will likely be asked this by future group members, by the activities office, when you table at events, and so on. Thus you should have a great answer ready to go. Maybe you started the group because your school already had twenty religious groups, perhaps because you or someone you know experienced discrimination because of his/her worldview, or maybe you want to meet other nontheists at your school.

Next, what will be your group’s mission? Think about what you would like to be the unifying goals in your group. Here are some examples:

What brings us together?

“[We are] a campus organization with the purpose of uniting the many agnostics, secularists, skeptics, and atheists on campus and providing an opportunity to socialize with like-minded individuals, while questioning religious and theistic beliefs.” - *The Agnostic and Atheist Student Association (AgASA) at the University of California, Davis*

“Committed to a rational worldview, we cherish the contributions of the scientific community and universally oppose the undemocratic imposition of superstition and myth. We seek to correct the stereotype that non-theists are apathetic, immoral, and untrustworthy.” - *Atheists, Agnostics, and Rationalists at the University of California, Irvine*



Maybe you want to make friends...with Richard Dawkins!

“We are all either nontheists ourselves or committed to preserving the secular nature of the U.S. government. Everyone is welcome to join, regardless of religious affiliation. Although we are open to all views, virtually everyone who comes to meetings believes in Church-State separation.” - *The Reed Secular Alliance, at Reed College in Portland, Oregon*

What would you like your group to teach?

“[We] seek to demonstrate, by argument and action, that it is possible to lead a good and meaningful life without religion, and that ethics and morality can be meaningfully based on rational and humanistic ideals and values.” - *Students for Freethought (SFF) at The Ohio State University*

“The very core of our rational, secular, free, and democratic society has been severely marginalized in our communities, on our campuses, even in our classrooms. We cannot afford to endure this development with indifference. A resolute campaign to educate people about the principles of reason is necessary as never before.” - *Students for A Nonreligious Ethos (SANE) at the University of California, Berkeley*

We advocate the acceptance of all non-believers, provide a safe and civil grounds for practicing scientific examination of rational ideas, and promote scientific inquiry and critical thinking to view the world with skepticism, wonder, and beauty. -*Scientific Understanding and Reason Enrichment (SURE) at the University of California, Santa Barbara*

What would you like to see your group do?

“The group aims to foster constructive discussion between students, faculty, and guests based around social and moral issues that impact our society.” -*Stony Brook University Freethinkers*

“Major goals and agendas include having like-minded fellowship, providing a supportive community for the non-religious, combating religious bigotry with comedic relief, promoting pride in our beliefs and convictions, safeguarding the wall of separation of church and state, as well as doing community service in the name of Humanism.” -*Pastafarians at the University of South Carolina*

“[Our group has] been active providing a community for atheists, agnostics, and other secularists - showing movies, hosting speakers, and performing community service in the Santa Barbara Area... we'd like to be a positive influence in our community and on campus by committing to community service and civil engagement, spreading intellectual advancement and showing the best that science, reason, and truth have to offer.” -*Scientific Understanding and Reason Enrichment (SURE) at the University of California, Santa Barbara*

Justifying your Existence

Sometimes it is necessary to explain more than a project you want to fund. You may need broad arguments to explain your groups' existence in the first place. Here are some talking points SSA board member Andy Lyman-Buttler came up with:

Full Article by Andy Lyman-Buttler
[www.secularstudents.org/node/1646]

- (Our university) has (insert disproportionately large number / approximation) religious student organizations, but we are the only group on campus explicitly for nontheistic students.
- Many of our members come from conservative small towns where the church is the center of community life and atheism/agnosticism is taboo and completely closed to discussion. For these people, our group is incredibly valuable - it may literally be that person's first opportunity to openly express his/her doubts.
- Our organization contributes a unique perspective to our university's marketplace of ideas.
- According to a recent study, atheists are America's most unpopular minority. This evidences a need for organized groups to combat stereotypes, misinformation, and prejudice [www.soc.umn.edu/assets/pdf/atheistAsOther.pdf].
- We're not necessarily against religion; we're proponents of science, rationality, open discussion, free inquiry, freedom of conscience, and sound reasoning about ethical issues. Our members represent a wide spectrum of ideas.
- We frequently cooperate with campus religious groups to co-sponsor forums, debates, dialogues, and social events.
- The flurry of recent bestsellers (Dawkins, Harris, Hitchens, et al.) demonstrates that people are interested in learning more about atheism, and our group is an excellent educational resource for the university community.

Long-term Goals

Keep your goals clear and have in mind what actual work is required to achieve your ends. If you plan and act carefully, you may have an amazing group on your hands in no time (well, in just a few months anyhow).

What do you hope your group will eventually be able to do? Here are some common goals for new groups:

- Have a membership of over 400, with more than 100 people attending meetings each week
- Introduce thousands of new students to the secular movement each year
- Hold debates and other events with big-name speakers that draw audiences of over 2,000
- Become a universally-known presence on your campus
- Regularly publish open-editorial pieces in the campus paper that champion reason and human-based ethics
- Send members to annual conferences of national organizations every year
- Change a long-standing policy at your school or in your community that has religious undertones



Maybe you want to change the image of atheism, like Don Sutterfield from Ohio State University.

Once you have a clear vision of what you want your group to become, it is easier to stay motivated and inspire future leaders and volunteers. This will keep your group alive long after you have graduated. Realize that the existence of a plan does not mean things will always go according to plan. There are going to be surprises. However, having a plan will help you deal with those surprises more elegantly and quickly.

High School Groups

Trying to start a group in a high school will involve challenges different than those encountered by college groups. The requirements for starting and running a group will be different, and the things you can do with your members may be different because some of your members will be under the age of 18. (For example, you may need signed permission slips to take field trips.)

Planning for succession and leadership is even more important on the high school level than it is on the college level. Having a teacher or other adult staff member as your advisor may help to ease the effects of summer vacation. Make sure that you elect new student leaders before summer vacation and come up with a rough plan for how to start back up next year. For advice on leafletting in high schools, refer to the San Diego Campaign to Demilitarize Our Schools. If you have teachers, counselors and other staff in your school who would like to learn more about secular students, direct them to our Educators page.

When secular students attempt to form high school groups, difficulties such as community resistance and legal problems may arise. The SSA has several experts on its Advisory Board - including former high school activists, high school educators and attorneys - who have experience with such issues and have agreed to lend their time and expertise to benefit students like you.

We may be able help with a broad array of legal issues, including:

- What Are My Rights as a Secular High School Student?
- What Can I Do About School-Led Prayer at My School?
- What To Do If School Officials Oppose My Group's Formation?
- What Can I Do If I Am Threatened For Starting My High School Group?
- What Can I Do About the Ten Commandments Being Posted at My School?
- What Can I Do If My Group is Harassed by Religious Students/Non-Students?

Leafletting in High Schools
[www.secularstudents.org/node/2577]

Educators Page
[www.secularstudents.org/educators]

In the event of resistance or difficulties at your school or starting a group, contact the SSA Campus Organizer [organizer@secularstudents.org] immediately for assistance!

Section 2 | Faculty Advisor

Why Do We Need an Advisor?

Most campuses, even small ones, require a faculty advisor for the group to be officially recognized. Many campuses require a faculty member to sign for room requests, funding requests, and more or less anything involving money or college resources. Even if you are not required to have an advisor, it is a good idea to find one. It lends the group greater credibility, and some advisors become active in groups, attending meetings and being an occasional speaker. Advisors can offer guidance in sticky situations or in determining the goals and mission of the group. They usually have more experience with the university than a student, and may have some insight into the inner workings of your school's resources and bureaucracy. Even if the student leadership of your group changes every year, an involved advisor can add stability and be a permanent contact for your group. If you are creating a high school group, it is likely you will have to have an adult advisor present at all times because of legal issues (e.g. members under the age of 18).

If you don't have anyone in mind, it is good to start by asking faculty in the Philosophy, Psychology, Biology or Anthropology departments at your school. Find potential advisors on your school's website. Check out their bios and publications. Then make an appointment to visit them in person. You should always come to potential advisors with the following:

- A mission statement or explanation of purpose
- Your contact information and the contact information of other officers
- An SSA brochure, to show them you want to be part of a national movement
- A smile and cheery tone in your voice

Make sure you clearly articulate the purpose of the group and the expectations you have of the potential advisor. If you want the advisor to show up to a meeting once a term, make that clear. Some advisors may not be interested in more than signing the occasional form, while others may show up to every meeting. Your group can succeed with either arrangement; most advisors fall somewhere in between.

All else being equal, try to pick a professor with tenure. The more seniority the professor holds, the less risk they take in being advisor to your group. Even more importantly, they are likely to have more time to help and support your group.

Don't worry about your advisor becoming "too" involved. This is almost never a problem. However, make sure they understand that this is a student group and thus students should be the ones making most group decisions.

Keep your advisor in the loop! If you have a regular e-mail update on your group's activities, add the advisor to it. If you don't have such a list (though you really should), send them a personal e-mail at least once a month to let them know about your group's latest activities.

Sometimes your advisor will not be able to provide you the help that you need. Student groups are rarely an advisor's first priority and sometimes they may forget about your group completely. If for some reason you become unhappy with your advisor, it is important to first contact the advisor with specific things (s)he can do to better serve your group. Since the professor was willing to sign up to be an advisor in the first place, odds are that (s)he will try to improve. Also ask if there is anything you can do to make it easier for the advisor to assist you.

If you've done this and the advisor is still not living up to your expectations, you may want to ask the advisor if they know anyone else who has more time to advise your group. This may get your advisor to fall in line, or (s)he may have a legitimate suggestion. You can also consult your student activities board for assistance with problems of this nature.

Once you start shopping for another advisor, let the old advisor know as soon as possible and be as clear as possible about why you're doing so. As tempting as it is, burning bridges is never a good idea. Be sure to be polite with the old advisor at all times, and to paint the problem in terms of condition (e.g. "We know you are exceptionally busy,") rather than nature (e.g. "You are far too stupid and irresponsible to be an advisor for our group.") The last thing you want is to create a bad image for your group.

Dear Professor _____,

My name is Kelly McDoogle, and I am a student here at the University of Georgia. I am writing to ask for your assistance. I would like to start an affiliate of Secular Student Alliance at our campus. I think our university would greatly benefit from the creation of this group. We have twenty different religious groups on campus and a humanist or nontheist group would add some diversity. As you may know, for a campus group to be recognized, it must have a faculty advisor. I was wondering if you would like to meet to discuss the possibility of becoming our advisor for next school year. This role would include any guidance you could offer, attending conferences, and helping us set up events and bring in speakers. Please get in touch with me to let me know when a good time to meet would be. The best times for me to meet are Monday, Wednesday and Friday before noon. Thank you.

Sincerely,
Kelly McDoogle

Section 3 | Leadership

The vast majority of Secular Student Alliance affiliates have both official and unofficial leaders. Official leaders are the ones elected by members to serve on an executive council or board of directors. Unofficial leaders can be appointed, or include those members who contribute lots of help, ideas and time without holding a position. Both official and unofficial leaders are important to the health and survival of a student group. Your leadership structure should be more about forming a core group rather than a governing body. A strong core of people who are involved and attend every meeting helps the group to flourish and grow. Also, when leaders and members become friends, it allows them to enjoy their work with the group and makes them want to get more involved, improving the quality of the leadership and thus the quality of the group.

Official Leaders and the Executive Council

Every organization requires structure for administration. This structure is commonly called the executive council, board, or some other variation. This is the group of elected leaders who run many of the group's operations. Ideally, officer positions determine who is responsible for getting work done more than they define who is in control of the group. Your group's structure may be affected by requirements at your school and the needs of your particular group. Some groups want to avoid a hierarchical structure and look for a "flatter" structure where the power is distributed



Proud leaders of the University of Minnesota Atheists and Humanists

among everyone. While we strongly encourage the executive council to be elected, we discourage approaches that are “too flat.” In small to average sized groups, dividing the power between too many people is inefficient, whereas in particularly large groups (where there is more power to be had) it may be important to have a system of checks and balances.

<p>Depending on the number of people you have starting your group, you may adopt a simple, traditional administration:</p> <p>Officers of Madison Atheists at the University of Wisconsin-Madison use the following structure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• President• Vice President• Secretary• Treasurer	<p>Another option is to adopt a structure with less hierarchical, more descriptive job titles:</p> <p>Officers of Campus Atheists, Skeptics, and Humanists at the University of Minnesota:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Activities Director• Administrative Director• Public Relations Director• Advertising Director• Finance Director
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A descriptive strategy works especially well on small campuses to encourage development without alienation. Some universities have specific requirements concerning the number and type of officers required to form a “recognized” student group. Reviewing and fulfilling these requirements is an important step for your group – once you are recognized you will probably have more access to university resources and you will be able to become an SSA affiliate group. (This is explained in further detail later in this chapter). If you need help recruiting new leaders for these positions check out our tips in the “Succession Planning” section.

Unofficial Leaders

The list of leaders in your group does not stop at elected positions. Are there people who attend every meeting, volunteer at every opportunity, or who have recruited enough members to form a small army? These people are certainly leaders too. They are the most likely people to fill official leadership positions in the future, and thus your goal should be to cultivate your relationship with them as best you can. You can do this in many ways:

- Invite volunteers to executive meetings so they can learn how things are run
- Give them small tasks if the executive board is too busy to handle something
- Ask for their ideas on how to make the group better
- Ask them to lead a meeting on a topic that they are knowledgeable about

If you find that these people are successfully managing repetitive and necessary tasks, it might be a good idea to formalize their positions. This might encourage them and improve the function of the group. Instead of having your volunteer plan a few parties, ask him/her to be social chair. This also benefits the individual, as (s)he can also list the official position on resumes.

While the official leaders are the ones with the final say, having a healthy relationship between the official and unofficial leaders is critical to having a healthy group.

Delegation

Delegation is an extremely vital component of a healthy, sustainable group. New leaders often attempt to do everything themselves. This usually comes from one of two sources: (1) an inability to delegate effectively, or (2), a problem with power struggles and control issues.

Delegating is a habit. As with most habits, the more you do it, the easier it becomes. Task delegation should be pursued at every opportunity. A great way to do this is to allot time at every meeting to get members involved in various aspects of the group. Both large and small tasks should be outlined and divvied up according to the interest and abilities of members. Responsibility should be clear, and time should be set aside for any needed direction or training.

Here are the most important aspects of delegating any task:

- Be specific
- Be clear
- Include a **precise** due date
- Name one unambiguous responsible party
- Make a note for yourself to check in on the task

Let's take a look at two methods of delegation. One is a common mistake, and the other shows a proper method of delegation.

Incorrect

President: "Hey Isadora, thank you so much for volunteering to work on organizing the debate next semester with our other volunteers. All sorts of things need to be accomplished. We need hotel rooms for the speakers. The treasurer is drawing up a budget so we can get matching funds from the University. We need to promote the event all over campus. There is just so much to do! I am so glad that you are on board to help. Why don't you get in touch with the other volunteers to see how you can help out? Thanks again."

Correct

President: "Hey Isadora, thank you so much for volunteering to work on organizing next semester's debate. Since you are majoring in finance, why don't you work on the event budget with our treasurer? Specifically, we need to know the requirements for receiving matching funds from the University. Call up the student affairs office and get all the information you can on that subject. We will need that information by next Tuesday, so please write all the pertinent information in a one page report and email it to me by then. I'll make a quick note that you're doing it so I won't forget. Thanks!"

The truth about delegating is that the buck stops with you, the group leader. If tasks are not being accomplished in the time or manner that you prefer, the fault lies with you. Feel free to gripe about lazy or inept volunteers, but realize that it is not going to get anything done. It is your responsibility to motivate them, adjust your delegation style, or reduce the scope of the task to meet their individual time and abilities. Delegation is a skill that takes time to learn, but with enough practice and patience your group will be running like a well-oiled machine.

Some other delegation hints:

- Before you can hope to organize others, you must organize yourself. Make you sure you understand what your group is doing and how it is doing it before you start giving orders.
- Occasionally you are going to have to delegate a task to people that are not as skilled as you. It is important to let go and let them do it.
- However, don't lower your standards. If a volunteer has done something so poorly that the group cannot use it, you need to tell them. Be as constructive and specific in your criticism as possible and offer to show them how to do it better.
- If you have to delegate information-gathering tasks, pick your brightest volunteer to do it. It can be difficult to check the work of an information gatherer without redoing the work, and on-the-fly thinking is often needed.

Administrative Meetings

A way to get things done is to have meetings just for officers and volunteers. Here is an Administrative Meeting Agenda:

	<i>Freethinker Alliance of Wild 80's Hair University</i>
	<i>Executive Council Meeting - June 28, 2009. 2PM</i>
	<i>Location: Flock of Seagulls Memorial Building, room 1234</i>
	1) <i>Business from last meeting (10 minutes)</i>
	a) <i>Status of article Pat was writing for the school newspaper</i>
	b) <i>Thanks to Joe for arranging Dr. Smith to speak for our group on 5/17</i>
	c) <i>Who has the staplers from the last flyering?</i>
	2) <i>Brainstorming events for Fall Semester (30 minutes)</i>
	3) <i>Update on advertising for Gish/Massimo Debate (5 minutes)</i>
	4) <i>Status of ordering a banner with group name d& logo for tabling (5 minutes)</i>
	5) <i>Creating a website- Do we have the resources? (20 minutes)</i>
	6) <i>New business/general comments (20 minutes)</i>
	<i>Meeting time: 1h, 30m</i>

Make sure to let your whole group know when these meetings are and that they are welcome, but keep business meetings separate from general meetings. No one is going to come to the meeting to be entertained or educated. But they might be interested in getting more involved. Have an open door.

More Ideas than Humanpower

Student groups are run by students who are often young, creative, optimistic people. This may sound great (and it really is!), but it can be frustrating when you end up with plenty of idea men and women, but no volunteers willing to do the work. For instance, a lot of what can keep a group well populated is hours of posting flyers all over campus every week. As leaders, you must challenge volunteers to put their money (and their time and effort) where their mouths are.

Let's look at another example of a typical exchange that could take place at an administrative meeting:

PRESIDENT: Does anyone have anything else to say about how we could improve and expand the website?
GENE: Yeah, I do. You know, it would be really neat to have some more educational resources about atheism and humanism. Something real modern, that allows students to relate more to the movement, so I was thinking of a sort of 'Living Atheist, Agnostic and Humanist Hall of Fame' thing. You know, we could have short bios, quotes and pictures of people like Woody Allen and Wendy Kaminer.
PRESIDENT: Neat idea, Gene. So, by what deadline can you gather all the information and put it together so Joanne can just upload it to the website?
GENE: Er, uh, I can't do most of that myself. I mean, I'm in the middle of my honors research project and I already flyer every week for this group.
PRESIDENT: Bummer, because it is a good idea. Well, let's keep it in mind next year when we'll hopefully have more volunteers or not so much on our plate.

Burnout

Especially when a group is in its first year, a lot of responsibility can be put onto the shoulders of very few people. The combination of running a group, staying awake in class, and partying until dawn can overwhelm and burn out even the most dedicated leader or volunteer. Fortunately, there is something you can do about it!

Avoid Burnout in Yourself:

- Don't try to do everything yourself.
- Ask for help often.
- Ask. When you don't know how to do something, find someone who does and ask for advice.
- Take breaks, socialize, etc.

Avoid Burnout in Others:

- Recognize when members are tired or too busy and don't ask them to do more than they can handle. Remember, many people have trouble saying "no."
- Pat people on the back every time they do a job well done, especially in public. For example, at the end of every academic term you could hand out certificates of appreciation.
- Reward. If your group can afford it, reward them by taking them out for lunch or dinner, having them over for a meal or giving them a small gift certificate to a book store.
- Don't nag; use friendly reminders to encourage people to do their work.
- Never be harshly critical. Remember, these are unpaid volunteers.
- If someone is doing something seriously detrimental to the group, stop them, but be friendly in how you do it.



Running a student group can sometimes be overwhelming

Section 4 | Group Name

The name of your group is amazingly important. Your group will be judged, in many ways, by the title you choose. It is the first impression people may have of you, and it can influence both perception and attitude from fellow students, faculty and the university's administration.

The most profitable and logical possibility is to take the name "Secular Student Alliance @ Your School" for your group. By using the name of the national organization, you instantly gain recognition and credibility for your student group. In order to this your group needs to become a Branded Affiliate. Being a Branded Affiliate is completely free, but you need to sign up. Also if your group loses its SSA affiliation you will have to change your name. But seriously, consider the perks! You save your group the trouble of having to design your own logo (you can use ours for free!). Choosing the SSA name for your group is mutually beneficial; it helps people to recognize our organization locally and nationally, connects your group to an existing network including many other student groups, and creates momentum for the freethought movement at large. There are also many perks to the SSA name and affiliation, including all of the services discussed earlier, being able to use the flyers printed by the SSA office, and getting occasional freebies like banners or discounted T-shirts. By choosing the SSA name, your group gets the special opportunity to become a *Branded Affiliate* of SSA. For more information on the benefits of affiliation and to affiliate your group with SSA check out our website.

Branded Affiliates Program
[www.secularstudents.org/brandedaffiliates]

Group Affiliation Application
[www.secularstudents.org/community/join.html]

If this option doesn't appeal to you or doesn't seem right for your particular group, you will want to consider your group's name carefully. Your name should be in line with your mission and vision, and perhaps descriptive of your group worldview or function. Another possibility is to name your group after a famous freethinking personality, such as the U of Arkansas Occam's Razors. You can view all the SSA's affiliate group names at [www.secularstudents.org/affiliates] to get more ideas or see some common choices. Some groups may not be okay with you borrowing their name, so always ask for permission first.

The secular movement is not entirely mainstream yet. Many of the words we use to accurately describe ourselves are not well known, and some have negative connotations. However, by using those words we are helping to put them into the modern lexicon and remove negative connotations. This is important work. It can get frustrating to see your group's name misunderstood. No matter how frustrated you are, keep a positive attitude about clearly and carefully explaining the meaning of your group's name every time you are asked. One of the central purposes of your group is education; keep that in mind when people have questions about the name of your organization.

Many groups end up with a long name in order to be inclusive and understood. Acronyms are a necessity with groups like the U. of Kansas Society of Open Minded Atheists and Agnostics, or SOMA. Acronyms can be clever: one creative example is U. of California – Berkeley's Students for A Nonreligious Ethos, or SANE. Of course, you'll need to be careful of unintended acronyms too; just ask the Bruin Associated Secular Students at UCLA why they added "Bruin" to their group name!

While it is inevitable that the acronym for your group name will get used a lot, make sure that you use the full name frequently. New people aren't going to know what the acronym stands for unless you tell them. Make sure that the full name of the group gets said at the beginning of each meeting (e.g. "Welcome to the Society for Open Minded Atheists and Agnostics," instead of "Welcome to SOMA"). Also, make sure your group's whole name is somewhere, hopefully quite large and obvious, on any flyers you print and on any website or Facebook group you might have.

Section 5 | Legitimizing & Bylaws

Becoming a Legitimate Organization

One of your first actions as an organization should be to complete the process of becoming a legitimate, registered student group within your institution. In order to have access to many resources your campus provides – meeting space, grants, office space, travel funds, A/V equipment, training, travel assistance, and many other benefits - you must first be recognized by your school's student activities center. Additionally, many schools only allow official student groups to post flyers.

Visit your student activities center (in person or online) to learn about your school's policies regarding campus groups. Most campuses require a group name, faculty advisor, names and contact information of officers, and a set of bylaws or a constitution. Some campuses even require officer training for groups to become recognized.

If you run into serious difficulties getting your group recognized by your school (e.g. obstruction from your school's office of student activities) contact the SSA's Campus Organizer [organizer@secularstudents.org] immediately for assistance!

Constitution / Bylaws

No matter what they are called by your school, the bylaws and/or constitution are the rules that govern your group, and every group needs to have some (most schools have sample copies). They detail leadership structure, member qualifications, the financial expenditure process, and many other operations that need to happen for your group to run smoothly. Your school may have specific requirements about what kind of governing documents your group needs. Requirements notwithstanding, it is up to you to decide whether your group needs bylaws, a constitution or both. When in doubt, start with a constitution.

What's the Difference?

A Constitution:

- *Is concise
- *Is a statement of the group's purpose / mission
- *May provide a historical or broader perspective
- *Is rarely revised / remains stable

Bylaws:

- *Outline specific procedures
- *Help the group conduct business in an orderly manner
- *Contain detailed policies that are in line with the constitution
- *Are easily revised / are revised regularly as procedures and needs change

What Should Be Covered In A Constitution?

Constitutions should be concise, yet contain the important framework of an organization. It is a summary of group structure and why your group exists, but does not detail every inner working of your organization. Your school / university may have requirements for what is included in your constitution, and may also have sample constitutions available. There are many ways to organize a constitution; a general example is shown below:

Article I

- Name and acronym if applicable
- Any affiliations with state or national groups

Sample Constitution
www.secularstudents.org/sample_constitution

Article II

- Purpose / Mission
- What is the core of your group? Community? Education? Activism? Service?
- Who / what is your group intended for?

Article III

- Requirements for *Membership*
- Students vs. Non-students, Dues?
- Depending on your institution / school, they may have mandatory membership / non-discrimination policies similar to this:
"Neither membership in, nor services provided by the organization will be denied to anyone on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, physical or mental handicap, age, sex, sexual preference, ancestry, or medical condition."

Article IV

- Elected Officers / Advisor(s)
- Who is eligible to run for officer positions? (e.g. candidates have previously attended at least 2 organization meetings, and will be students at your school for the duration of their term, etc.)
- Include titles, abbreviated description of responsibilities, and length of terms
- Are advisors elected or appointed / volunteers?

Article V

-Elections

- When are elections held? (For college groups, it is wise to do this mid-year / between winter break and spring break).
- What is the structure? (e.g. candidates get to speak about themselves for 3 minutes each, answer questions from the group, then leave the room so the group can briefly discuss their thoughts and anonymously vote).
- Do you require a non-voting facilitator who will count / tally votes?
- What is the voting procedure? (Does everyone get 1 vote or do you use "instant run-off" voting? Generally it is better to elect your highest position first, so that candidates who are not selected to fill it can opt to run for other / lower positions).
- What percent of members must be present ("quorum")?
- Do you need a simple majority to elect a leader?

Article VI

-Meetings

- Frequency, any special requirements (e.g. one service project per semester)

Article VII

-Amendments

- How are amendments proposed?
- Are amendments voted on by the organization at large (vs. officers only) and if so what percent of members must be present?
- What is the voting procedure?
- What percent of members must be present ("quorum")?
- Do you need simple majority or 2/3 approval to pass it?

What Should Be Covered In Bylaws?

Bylaws are the working procedures and processes of an organization. They are usually easier to change - requiring only a simple majority rather than the 2/3 vote often required to amend a constitution. Remember that both your bylaws and your constitution must be in line with the policies and requirements of your school / university, especially if you are trying to become a recognized / registered student group. Below is an outline of the kind of information often covered in bylaws (some topics may be mentioned in the constitution, and then covered in more detail in the bylaws).

Dues & Funding

- How is this group funded? By the school? Through local partnerships with other groups?
- Dues amount (if any), how & when are they collected?
- Are there requirements for how your group's money is spent / allocated?

Officers / Advisors / etc.

- Appointed Positions (this is likely to change / be revised as needed, which is why it is not in the constitution)
- Responsibilities of all positions - specific, detailed lists (e.g. the vice president writes the newsletter and sends reminder emails; the president is the liaison to the school, speakers, and other groups)
- Description of how to train your replacement / plan for succession (e.g., after elections, what responsibilities must next year's officers pick up before the school year ends?)
- What is the procedure if officers leave positions before their term ends?
- Is there a required number of business meetings per term?
- Is there required attendance of a certain number of said meetings?
- Are your business meetings open to anyone?

Initiatives

- Has your group made commitments to other groups or the community?

Other

- Specific policies and procedures unique to your organization
- Procedures for dealing with special situations (e.g. policy on dealing with a disruptive member, safety plan / guidelines, etc.)

Amendments

- How to / who can propose amendments (officers vs. anyone)
- Can they only be proposed at business meetings?
- Voting procedures, quorum, majority

Becoming an SSA Affiliate

In order to become an SSA affiliate, your student group must be recognized by your school / institution. In extreme cases (such as a group in a religious school that refuses to recognize you) this requirement may be waived, but first contact the SSA's Campus Organizer [organizer@secularstudents.org] to see if we can help. There are many benefits to becoming a SSA affiliate group, including access to lots more assistance and resources. If your group decides to use become a branded affiliate [www.secularstudents.org/brandedaffiliates] and use "Secular Student Alliance" as its name, we can also send you brochures and other fun things we may have laying around the office like discounted SSA T-shirts! (Not to mention the benefits of using a name that is already nationally recognized!)

Once you become a recognized student group on your campus and an SSA affiliate, you will need to maintain your group to keep your status current. Fulfill all requirements listed by your university (officer training, submitting paperwork, etc.) and be sure to fill out and return your affiliation renewal form to SSA each semester. When your group changes leaders, email the Campus Organizer to update your group's contact information.



Students from the Secular Student Alliance at Diablo Valley College pose with speaker Dan Barker.

Chapter 3: Running the Group

Chapter 3
Section Spotlight:
Membership
Advertising
Communication
Fundraising
Succession Planning

All of the *links* in this guide
can be found **online** at
[www.secularstudents.org/grglinks]



Members of Students For Freethought at the Ohio State University have a pleasant exchange with passersby while tabling on the National Day of Reason.

Another name for this chapter could be “Essential Group Functions.” The processes described in this chapter represent a compendium of best practices necessary for group survival. If you want your group to continue existing beyond its fledgling years, you need to start implementing good group-running habits now.

Section 1 | Membership

Membership is a difficult issue for many groups, as most do not want to charge students a membership fee. There are benefits and disadvantages to each option. For all members, you should keep the following in mind:

- How to become a member should be defined in your constitution or bylaws.
- Put all members on an e-mail announcement list to keep them informed of upcoming events.
- Keep track of members with a database or spreadsheet.
- Consider creating a suggested membership fee for students, and perhaps a mandatory one for non-student members.
- If you have the time and means, create membership cards and other incentives.
- Have an officer or volunteer in charge of tracking membership to keep things updated and organized.

Paid Membership

Having dues or a membership renewal fee offers your community a chance to literally buy into your group and show support. If you must pay to be a member, consider what the perks of membership might be. For example, paying members may get to vote, receive an additional newsletter, and/or be invited to members-only events. If you are worried that asking for money will preclude people from membership, create a scholarship program. Members who may be able to give more can donate to the scholarship fund to help sponsor others. Be careful – some people may be self-conscious about their financial status, so it is important to have a way to inquire about scholarships anonymously, and to keep scholarship recipients confidential.

Students for Freethought at The Ohio State University uses a three-tiered membership system:

- **General Membership** is free and everyone can join, student and non-student alike.
- **Voting Membership** is only available to OSU students. It costs \$5.00, gives voting privileges, discounts on merchandise, and entry into periodical prize drawings.
- **Donor Membership** is available to everyone and requires a minimum donation of \$20.00. Because of university policy, donors cannot have voting privileges unless they are OSU students, but all donors receive front-row seating at special events, first notification of special dinners and fundraisers, discounts on merchandise, and honorary mention on the group website if desired.

Andy Lyman-Buttler, former SSA board member and former leader of the University of Minnesota's C.A.S.H. tells us about his group's formal membership system:



Andy Lyman-Buttler

How much do members pay?

Students pay \$5; non-students are eligible for membership, and they pay \$10.

What does your group do with the money? (CASH also gets quite a bit of money from its school.)

Really, it's just part of the overall budget, so it's going towards all the things we budget for. The money is actually an important revenue stream for several reasons. First, when we apply for fees, funding and grants, the committees that award those like to see that your organization is capable of attracting funding from other sources. If x number of people are willing to pay \$5 for membership, that's basically x people voting with their wallets that the group is worth funding. The money coming in from dues is not insubstantial; in 2007, we had 100 members. Around 1/4 of our members were non-students, and a few students voluntarily contributed more than the "recommended" membership level. That worked out to about \$700 in dues alone. It's nice to have money that doesn't have strings attached. Every once in a while a project might not fall under the guidelines of fees, grants, or other funding sources...or perhaps you don't have time to write a grant!

What are membership benefits? Do you exclude non-paying members from certain activities? How do you get people to pay?

Members are entitled to vote for officers, run for board positions, check out materials from our fabulous freethought library, attend board meetings, make motions, etc. Also, some "fun" events (our annual year-end picnic, bowling night, etc.) are members-only. Membership becomes effective when payment is received, so by definition all members are paid up.

Why did your group enact this system? Did it need more funds to run?

The dues system is pretty old and predates any formal grant or fees funding our group receives. We keep it in place to demonstrate that our members think CASH is worth paying for, even if it's just a small amount.

Section 2 | Advertising

Advertising is a critical aspect of keeping your group alive. The best way to get people to your events is to let them know what you are doing, and where and when you're doing it. You can't assume that people who were at the last meeting will automatically come to the next. Spreading the word about fun and provocative events will increase your group's visibility on campus and ensure that you have a steady flow of new and returning members.

Flying

Flying is an effective and inexpensive way for secular student groups to garner publicity. Properly done, flying can do wonders to increase your group's visibility on campus. Flying is especially important during the formative stages of your group – it helps to establish your group and attract interested students and faculty. Even when you become well established, your group will benefit from flying on a regular basis.

How to Design a Flyer

The content of your flyer should be considered with two goals in mind: catching someone's attention and communicating a message in as few words as possible. Printing them on bright paper never hurts, either, but be aware that yellow is overly used for this purpose (you want your flyers to stand out from others, not blend in!)

What's Your Point?

Once you have someone's attention, what are you going to communicate? You only have a second before your audience's attention is elsewhere. Be brief and specific.

WHO you are
WHAT your event is about
WHERE your event is located
WHEN your event is happening
WEBSITE of your group

Often the simplest bit of additional information can make a huge difference in the success of a flyer campaign. You want your message to be so straightforward and clear that anyone could understand it. Students often walk by flyers half asleep and in a daze. They may glance at the flyer for only seconds before moving on, and it is not likely they will waste time trying to figure out the meaning. There are also other types of print media that you can create to help you advertise, explain and promote your group. You will need resources like this for tabling, giving to potential members, and passing out at events.

One way to grab someone's attention is through sophomoric means such as emphasizing controversial or taboo words. This approach may have unintended consequences. **You may inadvertently create a negative image of your group because the attention-getter overpowers your message.**

Does a person's
SEX
determine his/her
religiosity?
*Students for Secularism
will discuss this issue and
others this Wednesday....*

Professor Smith
believes that
***JESUS IS
DEAD.***
*Come find out why
this Tuesday...*

Instead of students thinking to themselves "Gee, that meeting on the ethical implications of human cloning sounds interesting," they may instead muse, "Man, those atheists sure are a conceited bunch of arrogant schmucks."

There are more sophisticated methods for getting your flyer noticed. The simplest is to use creative quotes and phrases presented in a large, engaging font. Flyers like these spark people's interest and compel them to read further:

SSA Flyer Exchange
-for flyer templates & other ideas
[www.secularstudents.org/exchange]

*“None of the
Atheists and
Agnostics in
(Group
name) are
lonely.”*

*“Extraordinary claims
require extraordinary
evidence”
-Carl Sagan*

*What evidence supports
the following
extraordinary claim? ...*

Nonbelievers of all sorts love to collect quotes, and there are ample resources on the web. Simply doing a web search for “atheist quotes” will bring up more catchy phrases and clever musings by famous heathens than you could ever need.

Where to Flyer

Just think of all the different locations on campus you've been to in the past couple of weeks. How many of them had spaces just crying out for the company of one (or twenty) of your flyers? Keep in mind that some locations (especially school property such as residence halls) require approval of flyer designs before they can be hung. The following suggested locations only scratch the surface:

- Outdoor kiosks
- Bulletin boards inside buildings
- Bathrooms
- Large lecture halls (give students something to look at during those long boring lectures)
- Above chalkboards in classrooms
- Inside retail establishments on campus that allow public postings (always ask if you aren't sure)
- Dorm building hallways
- On the backs of unsuspecting friends
- Anywhere you regularly see other flyers



Students at the University of Minnesota flyer for a big event

Flyers & Leaflets in High Schools

Almost all colleges and universities have easily-accessible guidelines for putting up public notices. However, the guidelines for public high schools are often much harder to find. The SSA has borrowed tips on this topic from a document created by the San Diego Campaign to Demilitarize Our Schools.

High School Leafletting & Petitioning
[www.secularstudents.org/node/2577]

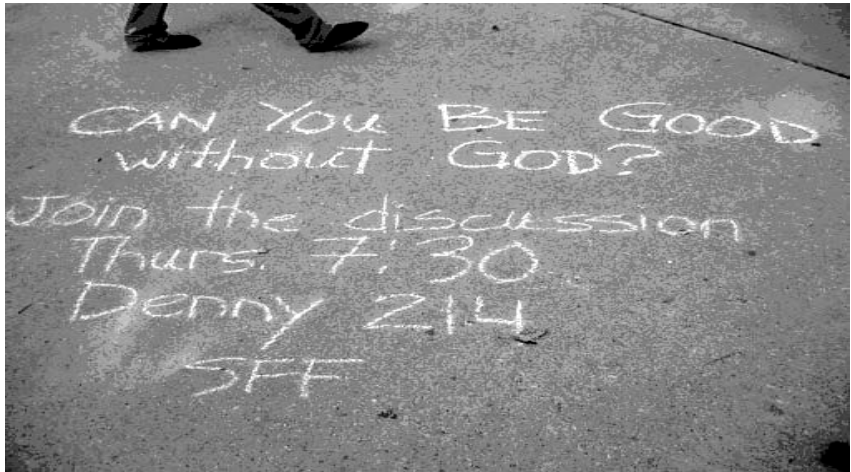
Division of Labor

Flyering and chalking (see below) require a few hours of work every time they get done. Ideally, you'll be doing them for every meeting. For bigger events, you'll need to do them several times. Flyering and chalking are easy, concrete tasks that new members can help with. You can get help with these tasks more easily than almost any other task your group does. Be sure to let everyone in your group know when you're going flyering and invite them along. Don't be shy about going up to members and asking them specifically and directly to come help. You should have a specific meeting time and place to start, but giving out a cell number will help those who are running late to join up with your flyering posse. Once you're all together, it's often worthwhile to break up the campus into areas (maybe even print maps) and have people break into groups of two or three to flyer the areas assigned to them. That way a group of six or seven students can hang hundreds of flyers. It isn't a bad idea to grab a bite to eat afterwards; in addition to advertising the group, it is an excellent opportunity for members to get to know each other.

While group-flyering is usually best, another way is to email flyers to the entire group, encourage people to print out a specified amount, and stick them in buildings during their daily routine. This way students can incorporate a somewhat tedious task into their busy schedules. However, it can be difficult to make sure people are actually flyering and you lose the social benefits.

Behold, the Power of Chalk!

No flyering adventure can be complete without its ever colorful and eye-catching buddy, Sidewalk Chalk. (Well, okay, when there's a foot of snow on the ground or there is going to be an epic rain storm tomorrow, maybe you can pass). Those cigar-sized sticks of chalk that you used to scribble on your driveway when you were a kid can now be used to get out the message of your group. Imagine the average student on your campus strolling to their first class of the day, looking down and seeing an invitation to check out a new freethought group.



Chalk it big! Chalk it proud!

Flyering and Chalking should be fun!

Make flyering and chalking social activities. At meetings announce that afterwards you'll be flyering and then going out for pizza or to the local coffee house. You'll cover more territory and make friends – not to mention that these people will likely become the future leaders of your group. Do not plan to cover the same amount of territory with three volunteers as you would with fifteen. You want to keep your volunteers engaged rather than exhausted.

Concentration vs. Distribution

You and your fellow secularists find yourselves with a bunch of flyers and sidewalk chalk. The campus is your canvas. Where to post/draw your message? There is a golden secret to effective flyering and chalking that groups usually learn over the years: concentrating your message in one area is more effective than sparsely distributing it over a large area.

Think about all of the competing messages that assault your senses on a daily basis. Placing just a couple of flyers in the surrounding visual "noise" will mute your message. Instead, pick a handful of high traffic (and appropriate) areas and cover them with flyers and chalk as if your life depended on it. You want to elicit a "whoa!" reaction from passersby. Remember that students may only glance at any posting or chalking for a few short seconds. Keep your message clear and concise so that viewers will immediately get the point. If most of the flyers in one location are a certain color, try to hang flyers of a contrasting color. For this reason it may be helpful to print your group's flyers in several colors.

Be ready for controversy if you use bold phrases, and don't allow members to tarnish your group's good name with bigotry. Students for Freethought at the Ohio State University received complaints one year concerning intolerant, anti-religious phrases (such as "Jesus is dead. Deal with it.") chalked on campus. In response Students for Freethought compiled a list of phrases approved for advertising the organization, posted the list on their website, and handed out the list to everyone who went chalking. Review the rules for flyering and chalking for your institution. Not following them will detract from your group's credibility.

Tabling

What is it? A group display, often at an event such as a student involvement fair, in which you have an opportunity to promote your organization to the student community.

Tabling can be a great way to reach out to fellow students and be visible on your campus. If you have been attending college for longer than the past twenty minutes, you are probably aware of the concept of tabling. Religious groups, academic clubs and annoying credit card merchants all employ the almighty table as part of their marketing tactics. They do this is because it is effective. You too should harness the power of the table for the good of your group.

Goals of a Table

- Recruiting more members / finding students who might want to join
- Meeting faculty members who are sympathetic to your cause
- Gathering contact information
- Educating the community about the ethos of secularism
- Networking opportunities with other groups at neighboring tables

Using tabling to attract new members is of paramount importance. Always have a sign-up sheet so you can add people to your email list or Facebook group. If you've got Wi-Fi and a laptop, you might even consider having people sign-up online right there and then. (Be sure to get a lock for your laptop and lock it to the table!). Laptops can also be helpful for showing videos or multimedia presentations (e.g. a slideshow of pictures of your group).

You may run into people who want to argue with you about the merits of your worldview. Feel free to engage them in a friendly debate, but remember that many bystanders who may be experiencing their first and only encounter with a secular organization will view your discussions. Many of these people will go on to become politicians, teachers, business leaders, voters, etc. The image they develop of your group today may affect how they one day vote on, legislate, or influence issues relating to the rights of secularists. Public relations and your demeanor should always be in the back of your mind during tabling. Be sure to coach table volunteers on this as well.

While tabling you have tremendous power to either do a great deal of damage to or a great deal of good for the secular movement.

Hemant Mehta of friendlyatheist.com and the former chair of the Secular Student Alliance Board of Directors has compiled a few tips on how best to do this.



Hemant Mehta

He says that a **friendly atheist**:

- Believes everyone should do what makes them happy, provided they are not stopping anyone else from doing the same
- Does not judge others for following a different path than his/her own
- Shows kindness, volunteers, and helps others
- Does not go around denigrating other religions or philosophies, because he/she knows that to get respect, one must give it
- Can talk to a religious person without starting an argument.
- Questions his/her own beliefs as much as others' beliefs
- Invites positive dialogue from religious people

The good news is that it isn't too hard to make a good impression. Simply don't lose your cool. Don't get emotionally involved in arguments with outraged opponents. No matter how well you articulate your opinions, it is unlikely you are going to convert a person strong enough in his/her beliefs to argue with you in public. However, they and other passersby may remember that the godless student behind the table was very friendly, respectful and willing to listen.

Where to Table

Tabling opportunities vary with the specific policies of each university. Some universities may allow students to set up shop any time they wish in student union facilities or public outdoor areas. Other schools have strict limits on when and where tabling can occur. Politely work within regulations the school administration sets forth. If you are unsure about your chosen location, ask. The last thing you want to do is make a bad impression for your group and your secular beliefs. If you have several options as to where to place your table, the more people that pass by your location the better; try to locate next to high traffic areas (pedestrian, not vehicular). If you are tabling outside, be prepared for the weather. If it's windy, you'll need something to weight down flyers and brochures so they don't blow all over campus. If it's rainy, you may end up with soggy literature; alternatively, if you will be sitting in the sun for several hours, consider putting on some sunscreen.

Excuses to Table

Student Organizations Fair
[www.secularstudents.org/node/2532]

Awareness Tabling
[www.secularstudents.org/node/2540]

Secular Holidays
[www.secularstudents.org/node/2590]

Current Events

Atheist Pride Day
[www.secularstudents.org/node/2551]

Free Hugs from Atheists!
[www.secularstudents.org/node/2553]

Holding a Superstition Bash
[www.secularstudents.org/node/2531]

Fiction for Fiction
[www.secularstudents.org/node/2550]

Reading Religious Texts for Charity
[www.secularstudents.org/node/2549]

Because you can!

One thing practically all universities have in common is a student involvement fair. These events have many names, but the theme and characteristics are nearly the same. They tend to take place during the beginning of an academic term, especially in autumn. They are intended specifically for student groups and are generally well attended by freshman and sophomores looking to become involved in campus activities. These events are critical for student organizations who want to increase the size of their member roster. Find out the date for your school's involvement fair and sign up! Advanced registration may be required to ensure that you get a spot, especially at large universities. If you are tabling at an involvement fair, find creative ways to make your table stand out. An attractive display or popular give-away items will bring more students to your table, and remember - brown folding tables always look better with a bright tablecloth.

What Materials Should Be at your Table?

- A brochure describing your group
- Information on when and where meetings are held
- The date, location and topic of your next meeting
- A signup sheet for e-mail updates and/or your Facebook group
- Literature on issues of current interest to the secular community (such as Freedom From Religion Foundation nontracts)
- Plastic literature holders to keep the table neat (these are inexpensive)
- A folding "science fair" style poster about your group (images are nice!)
- Your inviting and smiling face
- Freebies like key-chains or buttons are also popular (just make sure your organization information is attached!)
- Another option is to tape slips of paper with meeting info onto candy. Students are more likely to pick up a free sweet than to take a brochure!
- Note that while an organized presentation is more appealing, avoid overdoing it. Don't dilute your presentation with too many materials or distractions
- Friendly eye contact makes people much more likely to come up and talk with you



A beautifully organized table!

Good Old-Fashioned Networking

When you are trying to get people to your meetings and events, personal invitations are often highly successful. If you know someone who has views that are similar to your members', personally invite them to the group. Ask members to bring friends - it is much less intimidating to visit a group meeting for the first time if you have a friend to go with. If you are out somewhere as a group, don't be shy about telling people about your group and inviting them to come. Even if they aren't interested, it often begins very interesting conversations. Contact the leaders of student groups or academic departments that you think may be interested in what you are promoting.

Advanced Promotion Techniques

A major event, such as a debate, panel discussion or high-profile speaker, takes a little extra promotion.

Consider your target audience, and expand your advertising accordingly. For example, if Richard Dawkins is coming to speak on evolution, your audience also includes the Biology department, as well as those students and members of the surrounding community who have read Dawkins' books. Even opponents of his work might be interested in coming to see his presentation. Suddenly you have a much larger and more diverse audience than your average meeting!

Directly target these new audiences. Email, send flyers to, or personally visit professors of departments that may be interested. Talk to the leaders of other student groups or visit their meetings to announce the event. Send press releases to your local and student newspapers (see below for more info on press releases). To reach members of the surrounding community, take out an ad in the local newspaper(s) 2-3 days before the event.

Don't forget the value of Facebook for advertising. In addition to creating a Facebook event (which we recommend even for weekly meetings), you can use Facebook to advertise, as well. At [www.facebook.com/advertising], you can reach out to students in your area, on your Facebook network, and fine-tune your message to target certain keywords to get great results for a low investment.

Interacting with the Media

Building good relationships with the media can be the key to having successful large events and PR campaigns. The Secular Student Alliance is happy to help you develop lists of contacts at local media services. Just ask, and we can send you a list of all the email addresses and phone numbers for the media in your area.

You should work with the media in whatever ways are most available to you. Likely your school's newspaper will be the best resource for this, but a local off-campus paper can also be a very good resource. Newspapers are focusing more and more on local events—give them what they want!

Writing an editorial or guest column about your group can be very helpful, especially when your group is just starting out. Student newspapers are often delighted to have a reporter cover a new group. SSA can help craft and send a press release about your group getting off the ground. In this particular case, it's worth going to the campus newspaper's office and telling them in person that a new group is starting. You may want to arrive with a press release in hand.

Pulled off an awesome media blitz? Apply for the Best Media Coverage Award! This could include a letter to the editor or opinion column written by a group member, or an article written about your group or its activities - the winning group will get \$300.00 as part of the award!

Further Resources

2002 SSA Conference Presentation
-*Matt and Shannon Cherry*
[www.secularstudents.org/node/541]

Media Relations
[www.secularstudents.org/mediarelations]

Campus Publicity Techniques
[www.secularstudents.org/node/2585]

Guide to Writing Press Releases
-*Duncan Crary*
[www.secularstudents.org/node/568]

Best Media Coverage Award
[www.secularstudents.org/best]

Press Releases

Lots of newspaper stories start with press releases. Press releases help the media do their job by keeping them posted on what organizations are doing. When your group has a major event (which could include getting off the ground), you should let the media in your area know with a press release. They won't cover every event, but by staying on their radar, they may think of your group when they have a story that needs a nontheistic perspective.

A press release is a formal "news tip" that is emailed, faxed and sometimes mailed to newsrooms. It should read like a short newspaper article (no longer than 450 words); containing a headline, contact information, a summary paragraph and some direct quotations from the people involved in the story.. Keep your release short and to the point, including the 5 W's (Who, What, Where, When, Why), and never more than one page in length.

Send press releases to the media about a week before your events. You want to give them enough time to fit your event into their production schedule, but you don't want them to forget about you. For a really big event, there's nothing wrong with sending a release out a month or two ahead of time and then sending a similar release again a week or so before the big day.

Once you have sent your release, it is important to follow up with a phone call. Reporters are busy, and a personal connection can be exactly what it takes to get their attention. You don't want to waste their time, though; just let them know that you're following up on a press release and you'd be happy to answer any questions they might have.

Section 3 | Communication

Your group needs a website and an e-mail address. It's more comfortable for potential new members to check you out on the web than to show up at a meeting. While you can certainly build a website from the ground up, don't forget about easy-to-use networking tools such as Facebook, MySpace, blogs and listservs.

All of your web resources should list the following information:

- Your group's mission
- Your leaders and how to get in touch with them
- When and where your meetings are
- Upcoming events and announcements
- Links and information about local/national groups

Contact Email

Having a consistent, lasting contact email for your group is one of the most important tools for group survival. It is best not to use a personal email address for this – instead set up a general group email address that forwards to an officer's personal email. That way you don't have to publish your personal email (which opens you up as a target of spam and proselytizing emails). When officers change you can keep your group's general email address the same – just change what address it forwards to.

The SSA is happy to provide your group with an email address to use as a group contact email. These are usually formatted as "YourSchool@secularstudents.org." There is no inbox to maintain and no password to remember. We can also set it up to forward to multiple individuals, so you could have it forward to all your officers, or whoever in your group needs to receive it. When the time comes that you need to change the addresses that your email forwards to, just contact the campus organizer. It only takes a few moments to update your information.

Listservs (Automated Email Lists):

We recommend having three listservs:

- One for planning
- One for announcements
- One for discussion

Email & Web Forwards
[www.secularstudents.org/forwards]

Planning

Your planning list should have your officers and any volunteers that contribute on a regular basis. If you have an active advisor they should be on this list too, but it is polite to ask first (professors have clogged inboxes as it is!). Having a planning list can be an incredible asset in keeping the people that get the work done in the loop. Be sure to keep conversation on topic. Although some schools offer listservs to their campus groups, most of our groups have had the best luck with Google Groups.

Announcement

Whenever you table or send around an attendance list at a meeting, you should gather e-mail addresses for an announcement list. Then send well-edited, well-formatted messages out anywhere from once a month to once a week. Use this email list as a tool to keep a large group of people up-to-date about your group. Advertise this list on your website and in your brochure as well. Make sure that you:

- Only add people who asked to be added
- Take people off right away when they ask to be removed
- Set it up so that only your officers / advisor can send messages to the list
- Don't overflow people's email boxes (one email a week is good, more can get annoying)

Google Groups are a perfectly good solution to this. Be aware that if you get a lot of sign-ups on one day that you may have to enter the new subscribers over several days. Google keeps you from adding too many people at once to slow down spammers. Directly add those people who want to be added, rather than using the option to "invite" them to your announcement list. If these people already signed up it means they want to be added. Don't make them go through another step to get on your list (some may fail to follow through and click the link, while others may miss the message when it gets stuck in their spam folder).

Another site to consider is www.phplist.com, an open-source newsletter manager.

Discussion

Your group can become a thriving online community through a discussion listserv. These lists sometimes become as active and vibrant as face-to-face meetings. It is a good idea to have someone to moderate the list - tempers can run hot and you want to prevent arguments from damaging your group. It is also a good idea to have a list of proper behavior / email etiquette that can be referred to when a situation occurs. The SSA can help you write this. Google Groups are a good option for a discussion list. This list should be separate than your announcement list because not all members may want to be on both. A similar option would be to create forums on your website, or to create discussion posts on your Facebook group.

Facebook



The Secular Student Alliance has a Facebook group which anyone can join!

The easiest way to get a website is to simply create a Facebook group for your organization, and the SSA recommends this approach over a regular website. In fact, the SSA staff will create an email address and Facebook page for your group when you request a Group Starting Packet [www.secularstudents.org/groupstartingpacket].

The URL for a Facebook group is ugly and hard to remember. To help with this problem, the SSA will happily give you a "www.secularstudents.org/campusname" address that can redirect to your Facebook page. See [www.secularstudents.org/forwards] for more information.

There are a few things that should always appear on your Facebook group: an introduction or explanation of the group, information about your officers (or someone to contact), a list of your meeting times/places, and upcoming events. Facebook groups have a place where you can designate the group's officers, a place to list a group email address, and a place to post recent news. Most groups list the other information in the "Group Description" area.

Admins of a Facebook group can send a message to all members of your group. This is useful when advertising events, deciding on meeting times, and to make announcements. You can also create events hosted by your group (speakers, socials, special events and even weekly meetings), and then invite all group members to attend. Encourage them to invite their Facebook friends, too!

Facebook also allows you to search people's profiles within your network. You can use this to attract new members: do an advanced search under "Religious Views" and search for as many "identifiers" as you can think of. Not just atheist and agnostic, but skeptic, bright, humanist, naturalist, Pastafarian, 'none,' heathen, etc. Get creative! Once you've collected a set of names to invite, divide the invitation duty among all your officers (Facebook limits the number of messages you can send in a day). Or, use your school directory to look up those folks and email them outside of Facebook!

As with any web presence, you will want to make sure that the information on your Facebook group is up to date. If you have a communications officer or webmaster, this is a great job for him or her.

Other Networking Options

Though Facebook is more popular with college students, there may be members from your group who use other social networking sites. Choose whatever medium serves your group and your members best! Myspace, Twitter, Google Groups, and more may all be options worth exploring. Keep in mind that each site has a different demographic, so focusing on one may exclude part of your audience. The steps for setting up groups, inviting people, and posting events are generally the same.

Follow SSA on Twitter!
[twitter.com/secstualliance]

Website

Think about whether building a website from scratch is really right for your group. Maybe a simple blog from a site like [\[www.wordpress.com\]](http://www.wordpress.com) would be easier. Or maybe your group only needs a Facebook group, which is very easy to maintain. However, if you have someone who knows what they are doing, and they want to create a website, this can be a great benefit to your group. Remember that anything you or your members create needs to be easily accessible and updated by future leaders. With this in mind, you might decide that a website is too much trouble.

The primary focus of your website should be keeping it updated. Of course you want to make your group website easy to surf, with a professional and appealing design, but these elements become irrelevant if your website is outdated. Don't forget to show your pride by linking to the SSA website using an Affiliate Logo!

It is very important to consider what your group would do if the person taking care of your website suddenly left. If your group is packed full of computer science majors, maybe it isn't a big risk. If this person is your one and only technical person, they need to make a priority out of teaching others in your group how to update the website.

Think your group's website rocks? Apply for our Best Website Award! The winning group will get \$300.00 as part of the award!

SSA Affiliate Logos
[\[www.secularstudents.org/node/248\]](http://www.secularstudents.org/node/248)

Best Website Award
[\[www.secularstudents.org/best\]](http://www.secularstudents.org/best)

Website Design

Your website may be some people's first impression of your group. A few tips:

- Keep it professional. This adds credibility to your group
- Keep it simple – make your site easy to navigate and easy on the eyes
- Make sure your text style and color are readable
- Try to use matching rather than clashing colors
- Avoid large files – they can slow download / display time
- Your opening page should be a guide to your site – don't put all your content on one page!

Website Content

There are several things it may be important to include on your group's website. That way both potential and current members, as well as the community and local media will have access to this information:

- Mission statement / vision
- Names, contact info, and short biographies of your group leaders
- Current information about meetings and events (topic, time, date, location, directions, where to park, etc.)
- Summaries and images of past meetings / events and types of meetings
- Press releases and any articles written about your group
- Links to other organizations / the wider movement

Optional:

- A copy of your constitution / bylaws
- An explanation of what freethought is
- Discussion forums
- A web form for signing up for the email list
- Blog about what your group is up to
- Your current newsletter (if you have one)

Technical Support

Ideally, you want to have one or more officers or volunteers whose sole responsibility is upkeep of your website, Facebook group, listservs, and all members' contact information. Many groups find that keeping their websites and membership information up-to-date is more difficult than creating the sites in the first place.

If you don't have anyone with the knowledge or dedication:

- Talk to new, enthusiastic members of your group to find out if they have web skills and want to help.
- Contact the SSA for initial technical support. We can't solve every problem, but we can point you in the right direction.

Other Types of Publications

Publications should be considered once your group is established and able to sustain them. They should be created based more on need than want (otherwise they will go unread and become an unnecessary use of resources.) In terms of printed materials, brochures, business cards and flyers are your most important resources. Information about creating and posting flyers can be found in the “Advertising” section earlier in this chapter.

Brochures

A simple, easy brochure is the tri-fold. You can write your own from scratch or you can get ideas from other campus groups at the SSA Flyer Exchange. If you do create your own, don't forget to post them on the Exchange for other groups to use!

Business cards

If your group has a web site, you may be able to get away with business cards instead of brochures. They are easier and cheaper to make, use less paper, and are much more convenient to carry in your pocket than brochures. We can order some for your group!

Blogging vs. Newsletters

The SSA highly recommends that if your group would like to start a periodical communication, consider blogging instead of creating a paper newsletter. Printed newsletters are difficult to maintain and costly to produce. Blogs, on the other hand, are easily edited and linked to in email messages and on websites. Whatever is published in your group's blog should be interesting, readable, and representative of your group, as well as carefully edited and formatted.

Flyer Exchange
[www.secularstudents.org/node/300]

Business Cards
[www.secularstudents.org/node/2028]

Section 4 | Fundraising

Most schools will offer their student groups a small annual stipend, as well as usually provide space and equipment for websites, meetings, debates and presentations. However, most group leaders find these funds to be inadequate in covering all their costs, especially if they have ambitious goals. Fundraising is necessary if you are going to avoid paying for extra expenses out of your own pocket. You may also find that fundraising for charity is an excellent service activity for your group!

We encourage spending a bit of your own money, but make sure it is manageable. Many student leaders have thrown down a few bucks for nametags, flyers, and a bag of chips. It can be one of the most rewarding \$20 you'll ever spend. That said, those little costs can really add up, and if you're going to put on big events, you're going to need others to help.

Asking for money can be an emotionally charged issue. However, it is amazing how many people are willing to give you money if you give them the opportunity. Do not be afraid to ask for money. Believe in your cause and you can get others to believe in (and financially support) it too.

Paying for the Pink Gorilla (Know what you are asking for!)

The biggest key to doing fundraising is knowing what you want to spend the money on. You should always have a rough budget for the project you're trying to fund, and it is not a bad idea to have a budget for your whole organization (for a million reasons other than fundraising). The more specific a picture you can paint in a potential donor's mind, the more likely they are to fund you.



SFF members after a long day of tabling with the Pink Gorilla.

Any student group should have a steady small pot of funds for everyday expenses. These costs might include munchies for meetings, advertising, publications, poster board, markers, and neat little ideas that pop up at the last minute. For example, Students for Freethought at the Ohio State University helps to attract students to their Darwin Day awareness table by renting a pink gorilla costume!

Further Fundraising Resources

Our executive director August Brunzman gives a talk on some of the most profitable ways for student groups to access the funding streams available to them. It's available on our YouTube channel under the talk title "How to Become a Campus Fundraising Ninja."

Additionally, notwithstanding its insulting title, one of the best books for non-profit fundraising is *Fundraising for Dummies* by John Mutz and Katherine Murray (ISBN: 0764552201).

Small Scale Fundraisers

Not all fundraising has to be formal. There are myriad ways that your organization can make money, even if it is only a few bucks at a time. The first thing you should do is find out if there are any fundraising opportunities on your campus. Your university may have options to volunteer or clean to make money for your organization. This can be a good way to pick up some cash, and can double as a social activity for the group members who participate! You can also make money by selling things. In general, we would recommend that you steer away from selling food and focus on merchandise. If you do choose a fundraiser or activity that involves food, make sure that you carefully follow all health and food codes of your state, venue, and university. (You don't want anyone to get sick because of your group!)

Selling Swag (Merchandise)

These types of sales can encompass many things, from buttons and bumper stickers to T-shirts and books. If you are going to sell T-shirts, think about marketability. Will your shirt design be attractive to a variety of people, or only to members of your group? If you create a design that many freethinking people would enjoy, you will be more successful selling those shirts both on your campus and at freethought events like conferences.

Check out sites like EvolveFISH and the OUT Campaign to find freethought shirts, buttons, stickers and more that may be good for your group to sell. These types of merchandise are great for selling while tabling or at a speaker event! Oftentimes SSA can vouch for its affiliates to help you get goods on credit (which means you don't need any cash up front). Getting your own T-shirts printed can be expensive! Research the cheapest investment, make sure your idea is marketable and set a reasonable sale price. You don't want to lose money trying to fundraise!

Selling Food

Ah the American classic: the bake sale. While it is tempting to set up a lemonade stand or other type of booth to sell food on campus, it may not be as easy and profitable as you might imagine. Some states, cities, and campuses have stringent health and food codes – being in violation of these may create a bad image for your group! Also, people aren't willing to spend much money on cookies and cupcakes. Consider finding another way to turn a profit. That being said, if you do decide to do a food fundraiser, weigh your options carefully. What important differences / requirements are created depending on whether your event is on or off campus? If you are doing an event like a Flying Spaghetti Monster Dinner, consider collaborating with other groups. If your event is in a location that has a kitchen and food preparation guidelines already in place (such as a Hillel center or Unitarian Universalist Church) follow their model or ask if there is a kitchen staffer who can help you.

Selling Services

There are many things that you can do for other people to get money and donations. A classic example of for-service fundraising is the car wash. Another option is to hold a "Soul Auction" where members of your group let others bid on their souls. This ends up being a sale of services; people agree to perform some task to "get his/her soul back." Not all universities allow the sale of services, so check with your student organization office first. When doing for-charity fundraising, reading religious texts can be an interesting way to generate funds. Set up a table with a variety of religious texts and then ask for donations to read from the texts. Consider how to advertise this – a provocative sign such as "Ethical Atheists Read from the Bible to Raise Money for Leukemia Research" – may generate interest and participation. Of course there are lots of other ways to fundraise for your group or for charities - be creative!

Merchandise Sale
[www.secularstudents.org/node/2539]

OUT Campaign
[outcampaign.org]

Evolve FISH
[evolvefish.com]

FSM Dinners
[www.secularstudents.org/node/2558]

Soul Auction
[www.secularstudents.org/node/2548]

Read Religious Texts for Charity
[www.secularstudents.org/node/2549]

Institutional Donors

Your School

The most important institutional donor to you is very likely going to be your school. There are sometimes separate offices for student organizations and student activities that are both likely to give you money if you ask. They probably have forms, requirements for receipts, and deadlines – be aware of these schedules and plan ahead! You may be required to submit funding requests for big events weeks or months in advance! Take these requirements seriously and odds are your school will cut you checks more readily as they get to know and trust your organization.

The campus institution that helps student organizations may give you money for operating funds—things like food, pens, paper, nametags, printing, chalk, etc. At some schools you may not have to tell them exactly how you're going to spend the money, while at others they may require a budget with line items. Activity boards may be willing to kick in money for specific events and are a great resource for learning about other funding opportunities on your campus. In any case, remember that you may be required to spend a certain percentage of your funds on specific types of supplies – be aware of these requirements and follow them stringently. Also, if your school requires an audit or financial report at the end of the year, be sure that your treasurer submits it in a timely manner; failing to meet these requirements may affect your student organization status!

The student activities board is more likely to fund specific events than operating expenses. The office's mission is to entertain and enrich the student body. Ask them for money for events that have the whole student body as a target audience, such as debates or high-profile speakers.

Another set of institutions that is likely to help fund events are individual academic departments (think philosophy, biology, physics, anthropology, and psychology). These departments are often interested in bringing their colleagues to speak. It's not hard to find topics in these areas that professors want to speak about that fall along the lines of your group's mission.

Off-campus Institutional Fundraising

In addition to your school, there are a surprising number of other organizations that would like to give you money. The SSA is one of those organizations. We award grants to student groups with interesting project ideas every spring and fall. You can apply on our web site [www.secularstudents.org/grants]. Contact us for more information; there are several other national organizations that may accept funding requests from you.

There are also local, off-campus freethought groups that are likely to help with fundraising. It is important to get in touch with any off-campus freethought groups in your area and build alliances with them. Their members will be excited and happy to know that youth are getting involved, and they are likely to give you financial support. Let them know what your needs are and they can help you meet them.

Another approach is to ask these local groups to include a fundraising appeal for your group in their membership newsletter. You may also be able to convince them to put a line on their membership form for an extra donation to your group.



Members of the Humanist Community of Central Ohio and Students for Freethought cavort. HCCO helps support SFF!

Individual Donors (under \$100 a year)

These donors usually don't give their whole gift at once. They might throw a few bucks in a food jar at a meeting, or pay \$5 for yearly membership in your group, or chip in a few bucks for gas on a road trip. In addition to the techniques listed above under "Small-Scale Fundraisers," here are some ideas on how to get money from this kind of donor:

- Collect! A collection jar should be conspicuously presented during all regular meetings – mention it and seed it by putting some money in it first. It's best to do this while people are watching.
- Annual membership fee. It could be a suggested fee for students and only mandatory for non-student members. Decide what is best for your group.
- Keep track of your alumni and send them letters telling them what your group is doing and asking for money. It's important to actually ask – don't assume they will understand an implied request.
- Always say thank you!

Major Individual Donors (over \$100 a year)

This is usually the most difficult category for student groups. Many of the techniques described above will work with major donors as well; remember that a polite, personal touch goes a long way! Often these donations come from individuals who have contributed smaller amounts in years past. “Cultivate” them by keeping them informed as to what you’re doing and by saying thank you when they do donate. Don’t be afraid to ask for donations – the worst that could happen is that they will say “no.”

The other sources for these kinds of donors are local off-campus freethought groups. Sometimes these groups have wealthy members that really want to see the youth movement succeed. After you’ve developed some trust with the leadership of an off-campus group, you may want to ask which of their members would be the best people to court.

Section 5 | Succession Planning

You may be completely revved up to start a legitimate student group at your school. You may have what it takes to create a vibrant community of young freethinkers on your campus. You may even become an active participant in the national movement. But eventually you are going to graduate. That is why you must plan ahead to ensure the group continues without you. This is especially important at a smaller college where groups have an even greater tendency to dissolve without strong initiative. Succession planning is possibly the most important function you can focus on to ensure group survival.

We lose about 12% of SSA affiliate groups every semester; the majority of these are from leadership “failures.” Leaders lose interest in the group, graduate without electing replacement(s), or after they graduate new leaders don’t have the knowledge, resources, and experience to take over. Another problem that occurs occasionally is that one leader “cares too much” and does all of the work instead of delegating - becoming such a big part of what the group is that the group loses its function after (s)he graduates. Because problems with leadership turnover are the biggest reason for group failure, you need to be considering long-term succession even when setting up a new group.

General Succession Advice

Time Your Leadership

In a four-year college setting, it is ideal to have juniors be officers. That way busy, senior-year members can relax and act as mentors to your new leaders. Note that this means you need to groom, nominate, and elect sophomore members to be leaders next year.

Plant the Seed

Who cares about your group and its survival? Who will help to carry your group forward with or without an officer position? Cultivate a culture of responsibility in all of your group members so that when help is needed there will be someone to step up.

Cross Train

If only one person in your group knows how to do something, you’re in trouble. If she or he gets sick or leaves the group, you will be in a difficult situation. Do your best to have officers train at least one other person in the group in their roles and responsibilities.

Delegate

From the start of your student group tasks should be shared between officers and members. If delegation isn’t occurring, burnout will.

Diversify and Open Up

Don’t hoard power and responsibility. Any new member has great leadership potential, but if you don’t give them opportunities to lead, that potential will never be realized. Utilize each individual’s talents and interests, and do not pigeonhole or assume someone would do a bad job when they haven’t been given the chance. If possible, diversify those who lead the group. Try to cultivate leadership of various viewpoints on the freethinking spectrum, different genders, and especially different ages/graduation years. Leaders often set the tone for a group and having all of one type can leave people feeling alienated. Having different graduation years helps the group maintain consistency, experience, and a better chance at long-term success.



Cliché but true...

Preserve the Core

The character of most organizations is determined largely by its leaders. As people change, the organization is going to change - which is a good thing. However, odds are there are some core aspects of the group you do not want to change. The most obvious aspect is your group's commitment to naturalism. There may be other elements you believe are core to your group's identity. Make sure you write down these core values, talk about them with the new leaders and practice them in your own leadership. You need to use both the written word and organizational traditions to preserve what is most important about your group. Try to pick just three to six things and focus on them. The fewer core values you pick, the more likely those values will be to survive.

Document Best Practices

The more you write down about the job you do, the better. If you get sick or leave the group, the new leaders will have your notes. One possibility is to write up a short report on all events, detailing what went into them (with dollar amounts and contact info); these reports can be put in a three-ring binder and passed down.

When Should We Elect Our New Leaders?

Ideally you should elect new leaders mid-year (soon after winter break, before spring break). That gives you the first half of the school year to identify and start training possible leaders, and the second half of the year to mentor and prepare new officers for next year. Some schools have requirements regarding officer elections; be sure to be in compliance with stated guidelines. Generally it is a good idea to have new officers start learning and picking up responsibilities before the end of the year.

Consider requiring each new officer to plan or facilitate one of your meetings or events before the end of the school year. Summer vacation is a hard time for student groups - people go on vacation, move out of town, and stop responding to emails. Clear up position responsibilities and transfer any necessary supplies or files to new officers BEFORE the school year ends.

Communicate

Keep in contact with old / retired officers and advisors. One way to do so is by having a closed Facebook or Google Group for officers. Even after officers step down, keep them on these lists so they can easily advise the new leadership. Also be sure to email the SSA Campus Organizer [organizer@secularstudents.org] to update your group's contact information and / or officer roster.

Planning for a Successful Succession

1. Identify Key Roles

Key roles are ones that are critical to the success of your group, like President and Treasurer. When you begin succession planning, evaluate these roles to see if they are accurate, necessary, and sufficient. If the current leaders are highly dedicated, but future leaders may not be willing to put in so much time, it might be a good idea to divide roles between more people. These new roles could be chairs for specific activities or functions, like volunteering, website management, or social chair. If a group is smaller, it might be a good idea to delete a position that is unnecessary or unlikely to be filled.

2. Survey Current Situation

Are people with the required skills and talents already excited about running for leadership positions for next year? Are there people in the group who might do a better job but simply have not identified themselves as good for the role? How about two years down the road? If you've got it covered for two years down the road, you're likely okay. Otherwise, ask yourself who within the group could do the best job at these key roles. Do you need to find ways to draw in new people outside of the group that might become leaders?

3. Directly Approach Potential Leaders

If you have the feeling that someone would be good in a leadership role, take them aside after a meeting and tell them. Be as specific as possible both about what the responsibilities of the job are and why you think he or she would be good at the role.

4. Nurture / Mentor

Once you have someone who is at least tentatively interested in a key role, have that person begin to work with the person that presently holds the role. Perhaps she or he can act as an assistant, or just watch the current role holder work. Your school may offer training for that role—do whatever you can to get the potential leader into that training.

5. **Support**

When the new person has taken on the role, don't abandon them. If it is at all possible for you to stay around and support them, do so. Ideally, get the person into the role a year before you graduate so you can simply be available as a resource when (s)he needs you. Your final year may be quite busy... job hunting, finishing up a thesis, etc. may make you a less than ideal choice for filling a key role anyway. If you cannot physically be around during his/her first year in the position, give the new leader your phone number and email address. Make a commitment to answering his/her requests for help promptly. Pass on any resources you utilized to your new leaders, including a copy of this guide.

6. **Repeat**

Make sure you impart the importance of succession planning to the new crop of leaders. It's very common for a group to die after its second crop of leaders graduate. Make sure that you transfer all necessary knowledge and resources to your new leaders before your school goes on summer break!



The vital transmission of knowledge from one generation of freethinkers to the next (Camp Quest).

Chapter 4: Meetings

Chapter 4
Section Spotlight:
General Meetings
Your First Meeting
Meeting Attendance
Group Discussions
Social Events
Last Minute Meetings

All of the **links** in this guide
can be found **online** at
[www.secularstudents.org/grglinks]



Students take a moment to unwind at the 2008 IHEU-AHA-SSA joint conference in Washington, DC.

Section 1 | General Meetings

What to Do?

General meetings serve three main purposes: to educate, socialize and activate. However, the most important thing to bear in mind is to keep the interest of the audience/participants. If you bore them, they are not likely to be back.

If you feed them, they will come. Having munchies at all your general meetings really does increase attendance. Remember to have a vegetarian alternative—vegetarians seem to be especially common among populations of nontheists. When you get to know your members you can accommodate allergies and other needs as well.

Start on time with a well-prepared opening from the President or Chair, including the name of the group, agenda and announcements of future events. Many groups conduct quick, personal introductions. A typical introduction could include: name, major or occupation, philosophical label and a random silly question that changes every meeting, such as:

“If you could have a superpower, what would it be?”

“What mystery of the natural world you most like to know the answer to?”

“If you could know the exact time and manner of your death, would you want to know?”

A nearly endless supply of excellent questions can be found in the “If” books by Evelyn McFarlane & James Saywell. Make sure the facilitator states that all questions are optional so nobody feels like they are being put on the spot.

Make newcomers feel welcome. During the meeting, try not to make too many inside jokes and explain past announcements fully. The President / officers should try to personally welcome all newcomers before or after the meeting and make themselves available. If officers are busy planning things or talking to friends, they are far less approachable. Strive to keep your group an open community rather than a clique.

Though nontheistic students are united in their use of rational thinking as the basis for their worldview, it is important to remember that students come from a variety of backgrounds. Badmouthing theistic religious or cultural traditions is inappropriate and may keep some students from returning to your group. Choose discussion over gossip, and inquiry over condemnation to make everyone feel welcome.

Consider giving away attendance prizes at meetings: a bumper sticker, last year’s T-shirts, freethinking books you found cheap on Amazon.com. This is a pretty low-cost way to get people to meetings and make the meetings more fun. At some meetings or events throughout the year, try to hand out feedback slips so people can anonymously suggest possible improvements for the group.

Do your best to keep the whole meeting under an hour and a half. If the formal meetings go longer than 90 minutes, people can feel trapped. You can always hang out informally as long as you want to after the formal meeting. Make it very clear when the official meeting is over.



Wabash College Freethought Society President, Charlie Lopez, runs his meetings with aplomb and efficiency.

When and Where?

Most groups meet either weekly or biweekly. If you want to keep continuous interest, you should have your group meet at least that often. When groups really get cranking, they might meet at least twice per week. Most of these groups find it is best to have at least one of these meetings be purely social with no set business program.

Once you advertise a time, stick to it. You can wait a couple of minutes to start the meeting if people are still trickling in. However, don’t let the meeting start more than five minutes after the advertised time. People have studying to do. Don’t waste their time sitting around waiting for your meeting to start. Starting late only encourages people to be late in the future.

Meet in a place that is convenient for your members and your group’s activities. As a student group it is logical to meet on campus, in a location easily accessible to both student and non-student members. If your university requires you to have most

meetings on campus, by all means do so! Consider consulting your advisor to see if (s)he has any recommendations or requests for your meeting location. Consider what your general meetings are like – How many chairs do you need to seat everyone comfortably? Do you want to have access to a computer / projector at every meeting? Does the location you are looking at allow food, have an early closing time, or other special considerations?

Basic supplies

- Printed agendas to keep the meeting on track
- A sign to hang up outside the room so people know it's the right place before they enter
- Depending on the size of your group you may want someone (group secretary or historian) to take minutes at meetings and type them up afterwards. Just a quick summary and record of any decisions proposed or made
- If you are showing a video or PowerPoint presentation, you will need to make sure that all AV and sound equipment is in order (laptop, projector, TV, DVD player, etc.)
- Nametags and pens to fill them out with. (This might seem too formal at a small school or small meeting)
- A voluntary email address list for weekly electronic announcements
- Some yummy munchies (refer to the "Meeting Attendance" section for suggestions)
- Some well organized freethought literature for people to inspect and ideally take home (we are happy to send you SSA and Secular Coalition for America brochures to accompany your own organization's literature!)

Greeter

Especially if you have a larger group, have a designated person who will greet people before and after meetings. Make sure that this individual is a "people person" who can put newcomers at ease. This person should approach visitors, provide group info, and direct visitors to the email / newsletter sign-up sheet. It is also a good idea to have this individual wear a name tag, even if name tags are not being provided to the group at large. Welcoming new people is the responsibility of the entire group, but having one person assigned to "duty" ensures that greeting will happen with more regularity.

Business Meetings vs. General Meetings

Don't make every meeting a business meeting! While it is valuable to be transparent with your members about group business and process, it is not necessary to include every member in every mundane detail of planning, budgeting, and discussing. Some students love business process – be clear that your business meetings are open to all members and inform your members of their time and location! This is a good way to find and groom next year's leaders. However, many college students are very busy, social people. If they can make time in their schedules to hobnob with other young freethinkers, that's great! But if every meeting is all work and no play, your members will quickly abandon your group for something more fun.

Things to Discuss & Do in Business Meetings:	Business-like Stuff Appropriate for General Meetings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budgeting, other university paperwork • Drafting proposals for changes to bylaws – have general members vote on the polished motions • Ideas for big events before discussing with the whole group (sometimes it is helpful to come up with several reasonable ideas and then have the general members vote for the one they like best) • Contacting speakers / guests • Reserving rooms • Applying for / writing grants for events • Ordering or buying supplies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gauging interest in types of events or ideas • Elections and voting • Giving the group updates about progress on a project or event • Delegating smaller tasks to general members

Dealing with Disruptive Personalities

Occasionally student organizations will run into trouble with individual(s) who consistently disrupt the flow or mood of meetings. Disruptive or difficult behavior could include arguing instead of discussing, dominating conversation, making inappropriate or aggressive comments about people, members, or groups, and being stubborn about discussions or topic conclusions. There are ways to prevent this type of behavior from happening, as well as to curb it if it does occur.

The best way to prevent this behavior is to have clearly articulated ground rules for member behavior (“decorum”) at meetings. Some suggestions to consider when creating these guidelines:

- Limit your time when speaking – everyone deserves a turn
- Avoid abusive and offensive language (including demeaning gender/ethnic/etc. terms)
- Avoid gossip and personal attacks / badmouthing
- Remind members that you are having a discussion, not an argument

Making your members feel responsible for your group as a community is another way to positively influence the way people act at meetings. If your members are vested in keeping your group a safe space and building community, it is likely that they will be more willing to step back and redirect themselves if a conversation gets out of hand.

Dealing with disruptive individuals is important because it maintains your group’s emotional climate and cultivates a culture of respect and fairness. When dealing with a disruptive member,

- Remain calm and respectful
- Try indirect means first (such as reviewing ground rules without calling the person out)
- Be consistent, firm and gentle – don’t argue
- Redirect the entire group – put the discussion on hold until the end of the meeting, or stop the discussion and ask for a show of hands to see who is interested in continuing
- Tell the group that in the interest of time you are going to limit individual comments to a certain length, tell the disruptor how many minutes s/he has to finish their thoughts, and then move on to someone else
- Ask the member to articulate their thoughts in writing, since – in the interest of time – it may be difficult for him/her to fully explain their views at the meeting

If these techniques don’t work or the disruptive person becomes extremely emotional, refer to an existing member code of conduct directly, and/or offer to go discuss the situation / the person’s feelings in another room. Ask the person what would help him/her to calm down. Keep your distance and don’t touch the individual, whether to console or to restrain. If things continue to escalate, become violent, or otherwise endanger your group call 911 or campus security services and try to get group members to a safe place / away from the individual. Situations like this are one example of when it may be useful to have an involved advisor. Your advisor will most likely be older and wiser than many of your group members, and may be able to talk down a disruptor calmly and with professionalism. Don’t forget to take advantage of the resources your university provides. Some campuses now have an office or a staff member who can help your group deal with these disruptive individuals. Ask the office of student life, student group services or a related office to see if your university can help you with this situation.

Section 2 | Your First Meeting

Your first meeting is special, whether it’s your first meeting ever or the first meeting of the year. You may not want to have a big event or a speaker for your first meeting of the year. It is a time for getting to know the group and new members. The first meeting should be held in the first week or two of an academic term. Get the interest of new students right away, before the best potential leaders become involved in other extracurricular activities.

Here are some things you might want to do at your first meeting:

- Wear nametags (nametags are a good idea whenever you expect new people).
- Introduce the group, its purpose, your plans for it, and your vision for how it will change your institution.
- Introduce all officers.
- Have officers speak about how they became freethinkers.
- Have an ice breaker, or just have people introduce themselves to those around them.
- For a variety of icebreakers, consult the resource *Deep Fun*, which was created by the Unitarian Universalist Association for youth programming. From the URL there is also a link to a printable PDF format.
- Introduce the movement that your group is a part of. You might define terms people use (atheist, agnostics, humanists, freethinkers, skeptics, etc.), outline the main goals of the movement and the many different approaches, or talk about famous nontheists.
- List some of the large secular organizations and explain what they do, or briefly discuss some of the most popular books or current news issues.
- Talk about what the group has done previously and what’s planned for the semester.

Deep Fun

[<http://www.uua.org/leaders/leaderslibrary/deepfun/index.shtml>]

Famous Nontheists

[<http://www.celebatheists.com>]

- Ask for feedback, either written or from people who raise their hands.
- Circulate an email list so you can keep in touch with new people.

Special Considerations for Your First Meeting - When Starting Your Group

If your group is just starting out, your first couple of meetings may be more about gauging interest and setting up structure than anything else. When having meetings like this, remember that all of the interested people you attract may not want to help with the business of starting a group. Try to keep general meetings fun and build interest for your group while getting prospective members to volunteer to do things like help draft a constitution outside of meetings. The upside to having a captive bunch of people who are excited about your new group is that they can help you do visioning. A room full of peppy freethinkers can do a bang up job of brainstorming! Take advantage of this but don't wear out your constituents before your group has even begun.

Section 3 | Meeting Attendance

Maintaining meeting attendance is yet another function of your group that is critical to success and survival. More strategies for holding meetings and types of meetings will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. Don't get discouraged if your first meetings are small. Stick with it and try the ideas in this section and your group will grow.

Have Regular Meetings

You can't expect people to show up if you don't have regular meetings (same time, same place, ideally every week). This is a critical factor in meeting attendance. Regular meetings establish a routine for your members to plan around and increases interest in the group as members build relationships. Once your members get in the habit of showing up at a certain place and time they'll be inclined to keep doing it. They'll look forward to seeing each other and get more engaged with group activities. A stumbling block is trying to find a time that works for everyone. Sometimes you can get people to respond to an email or poll, but often you just have to pick a time that seems like it will work. Once you have multiple people complaining that they can't make it to the meetings, then you have enough interest to ask around for times that might work better. If you are going to make a change, it is usually best to switch meeting times between semesters so that everyone can plan the new time along with their new class schedule.

Advertise for Meetings

Think of everything you would do to advertise a big speaker: your strategies may include flyers, chalking, posting events online, sending reminder messages to your email list, and asking members to bring friends. Are you doing the same thing for your meetings? Advertising meetings has two great results. It (1) attracts new, interested, potential members to your group, and (2) reminds current members where and when they should show up. You don't have to wallpaper your campus – a handful of bright, clever, attention-grabbing flyers in high-traffic areas and places of particular interest (a hip coffee shop, the science and philosophy departments, etc.) should do the trick. Save yourself some time!

Since your meetings should be the same time and place every week, design your flyers so that you can leave them up all semester. Then you just have to replace the ones that get covered, worn, lost or stolen!

Ten Ways to REDUCE Meeting Attendance

1. Keep your group's existence secret (like a closed Facebook group) and don't tell anyone about it
2. Don't tell anyone when or where your meetings are and make the information hard to find
3. Change meeting times and places every week
4. Hold meetings at times that are unlikely to work for people (early mornings, school days, Friday nights, on weekends)
5. Hold boring, business-only meetings that are only interesting to officers
6. Complain at every meeting about how people don't show up
7. Give up after trying an idea only once
8. Stick with one idea when it doesn't work after several attempts
9. Decide before trying anything that no solution will solve the problem(s)
10. Refuse offers of help

Include Activities

Your meetings are a great time to plan big events, design T-shirts and flyers, and take care of the business of running a group. But if all you're doing is taking care of business, the rest of your members will stop coming. Save some business for officer meetings. On the other hand, don't feel as though you can't have any business items on your agenda! Your meetings are a great time to do brainstorming, get feedback, and ask for volunteers. Just make sure that "getting things done" is not all you're doing. The key is to have activities at each meeting that people are interested, engaged and/or entertained by. There are lots of ideas out there, so get creative and get going! Your members may have suggestions – listen to them and take their ideas seriously.

Provide Snacks

Food goes a long way for college students - especially if it's mentioned on your advertising. You don't have to go wild and buy pizza for every meeting – a bag of chips or package of cookies should be plenty. Some leaders complain that they don't want to bribe people to come to their meetings; consider providing snacks a perk that makes your meetings more worthwhile. Other leaders think that people will show up just for food. While someone might freeload at a meeting that promises free pizza, it's highly unlikely that they'll come to a meeting just for potato chips. Always make sure that your meeting location is okay with food. The last thing you want is to create a bad reputation for your group by getting in trouble!

Ideal Snacks	Not-So-Ideal Snacks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Chips, pretzels, etc.; flavored chips are great – no dip needed -Cookies; especially homemade, but we dig Oreos, too -Snack mixes; any of the pre-mixed munchies you can find in the grocery store -Grapes; you may find that some members prefer this yummy, healthy alternative -M&Ms; a one-pound bag is usually enough for a group, and fabulously popular! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Anything that requires more supplies than napkins or cheap paper plates -Veggie trays never seem to go over well among college students -Meat-based food; secular groups attract a disproportionate number of vegetarians

Once you get to know your group a little better, you will know what they like and what allergies / needs to plan for.

Be Respectful of Your Members' Time

College students have a lot of things to do. Be respectful of this fact when running your meetings. If the posted meeting time is 8 p.m., start at 8. Yes, a few latecomers may miss the beginning of your meeting, but so what? If you advertise 90-minute meetings, don't drag on for two hours. Normal meetings shouldn't last longer than 90 minutes. If you're watching a film, don't interrupt, but on film night make sure to have little else on your agenda and to start on time. Be sure to announce when the formal meeting is over so that people don't feel obligated to stay when they have other things to do. This doesn't mean that you have to kick people out - a huge aspect of any secular group is the community it fosters, and post-meeting gatherings are a great way to build those relationships.

Get Feedback

Once you start getting people to come to meetings, solicit some feedback from them. Try to find out why they came, what they liked and didn't like. What would they like to see more of? Try passing out paper surveys, a clipboard with a question at the top that people can respond to, or other creative ideas. Once you have that information, use it! If comedy film night was a total flop, don't keep doing them. If everyone liked having the biology professor come speak, try to find another speaker to bring in.

Foster Your Group Outside of Meetings

You can increase attendance at meetings by fostering interest in the group outside of meetings. Does your group have a web forum, Facebook page, discussion listserv, or other method of communication? If not, you're missing a valuable tool for your group. Go start one up! Post interesting videos and articles, posts from your favorite atheist blogs, secular news, and info about secular events in the community that your members can get involved in.

You probably only need a few items a week, but an active, engaged group might send out several items a day. You may even want to assign an officer the formal role of moderator of the list to keep discussion moving. These tidbits remind people between

meetings that your group exists and that there's plenty of reason to stay involved. The more active a group is, the more likely people are to become engaged, and this is an easy way to show your group's activity level.

Section 4 | Group Discussions

These can be very successful meetings that are fairly simple to set up, since you don't need to arrange an outside speaker. You simply come up with an interesting topic such as "Death and Dying in the Lives of Freethinkers" or "Should America End the War on Drugs?" and then prepare several specific questions about that topic. It's a good idea to print out several copies of the questions. You can find discussion question ideas at [www.secularstudents.org/MeetingDiscussionQuestions]. You may need to adjust your discussion based on the size of the group.

- Small meetings (about 12 people or less) can sit in a circle and discuss the questions one by one. If a larger group of students attend, consider setting up some initial discussion rules, like hand raising or time limits.
- Large meetings (more than 20 people) should be split up into small circles and discuss different questions – later going back into one big circle and telling the whole group what their question was and how they answered it.
- If you put people in groups, mix them up so everyone isn't with his/her friends! For example you could hand members a playing card when they enter and have the different suits group together.
- If you have 35+ people you are going to need a large room or two separate rooms. It is going to get too noisy otherwise.



Yay, diverse opinions!

Here are some other things to keep in mind:

- People aren't going to stay on topic. Don't worry about it. The point is more to get people talking than to force them to talk about anything in particular.
- Instead of cold questions, try doing an activity to get people talking. Examples: rank common words (such as atheist, agnostic, freethinker, etc.) based on positive and negative connotations. People will likely have trouble getting a consensus on this in their group. Another option is to have groups make up skits and perform them about various things, such as how to answer common questions nonbelievers get, how to and how not to tell your parents, etc.
- Ask SSA for ideas and questions for group discussions—we have lots!

What has been your most successful meeting?

Michael Amini of the Secular Student Union of the University of Washington:

"At the SSU, we've had a number of different kinds of meetings, with varying degrees of success. Last year, most of the meetings were discussion meetings. We had an "Ask" series, where each week, we would bring representatives from varying religious groups for a discussion. The purpose of the meetings was not to debate, but to gain a factual understanding of what people believe from their own perspective. We had Mormons, Hindus, Jews, Christians, Biblical Literalist Christians, and Muslims. These meetings were probably the most well-attended of the year."



Michael Amini

Section 5 | Social Events

What better way to kick back and relax, than with your fellow freethinkers? Social events offer group members the opportunity to get to know each other and chat more than other types of meetings. Social activities can be a part of your regular meetings or be more ambitious outside events. Groups of all sizes enjoy informal social gatherings – building a community of like-minded people is one of the most important goals of a student group! Social events can be as simple as an occasional evening out, or can become regular events.

Run of the Mill

- **Food / Coffee** - Pick a low cost, centrally located place that can handle your group size. Calling ahead never hurts! You can meet at restaurants for planned events (e.g. end of the year dinner) or go out informally after meetings.
- **Potlucks** – People love to eat! Consider having a potluck or meeting on campus or in a member's home. There are many options from a BBQ to brunch! A fun variation is an ice cream social. Remember that not all of your members will have access to a kitchen. If this is the case, suggest they bring items that don't require preparation (e.g. chips and salsa, beverages, or paper plates).
- **Performances** - See a play, dance recital, art exposition, poetry reading, musical performance / local band or other event. Make sure to note if advanced tickets are needed and whether the venue is 21 and up! For a more casual atmosphere try a comedy club or a coffee house on open mic night.
- **Movie Marathon** - Spend an afternoon or evening at a member's apartment, or a dorm common area, with your favorite flicks and a supply of popcorn. Another option is to go out to movie theaters, screenings, or drive-ins.
- **Parties** - This might not be an official / group-sponsored event but it attracts a different mix of people who may not have been at meetings. To spice things up, try some wild themes!
- **Talent Show** - Freethought groups spend a lot of time sitting around and talking, but freethinkers have all kinds of other interests and talents. Have members sign up in advance and devote a meeting to letting them show their stuff!
- **Craft Night** – Bring supplies that will spark your members' creativity and see what possibilities unfold! Craft nights may work better if people are given a starting point / some structure. Get creative! For example, close to winter break you could have an "irreverent ornament / decoration" making night. It could even be turned into a contest.
- **Game / Board Game Night** - Have members bring in their favorite card, board, or video games (how fun would a skeptic DDR dance off, Wii competition, or other multi-player game be?) In any case, provide several fun choices.
- **Active Games** - For a variety of games and icebreakers, consult the resource *Deep Fun*, which was created by the Unitarian Universalist Association for youth programming. It has a variety of activities and community-building strategies, and can be found at [www.uua.org/leaders/leaderslibrary/deepfun/index.shtml], where there is also a link to a printable, PDF format. Or revert to your favorite childhood games!
- **Outdoors** - If the weather is nice, head to the zoo or a park, go outside for a game of Capture the Flag, or grab some blankets and go stargazing.
- **Joint Meetings** - Contact a religious student organization and have a formal or informal joint meeting with them. One of the most effective ways freethinkers can gain respect is through direct interaction with other groups. These events show religious folk that we're friendly, reasonable, honest people who want basically the same things out of life that they do. Another option is to have joint meetings with allied groups on or off campus – either other freethought groups or groups with similar political or service interests.

Seasonal Events

- Apple/fruit picking. See if any local orchards let you pick your own!
- [www.secularstudents.org/node/2545]
- Picnic or BBQ, camping trip, hiking
- Beach party, luau, water balloon fight, swimming
- Fun with snow, sledding, snowball fights, skiing
- Secular Holidays (see "Freethought Celebrations" section)
- Haunted houses (what better place for skepticism?), Hellstops

Religious Group Collaboration
[www.secularstudents.org/node/2555]

Service Projects
[www.secularstudents.org/node/2543]

Ask-an-Atheist Panels
[www.secularstudents.org/node/2537]

Local Collaboration Guides
[www.secularstudents.org/collaboration]

Progressive Organizations Mixer
[www.secularstudents.org/node/2530]

There may be a Hellstop or another Christian haunted house near you. Hellstop is a project run by fundamentalist churches that mimics haunted houses by taking visitors on a trip to "hell" that ends with a strong sell for Christianity. These haunted houses are emotionally manipulative and may benefit from having brave student freethinkers ask some provocative questions. However, be aware that by attending Hellstops you are financially supporting them.

Freethought Holiday Celebrations

Autumn	Winter	Spring	Summer
September 19 - Talk Like a Pirate Day [www.talklikeapirate.com]	December 10 - International Human Rights Day [www.un.org/events/humanrights]	March 8 - International Women's Day [www.internationalwomensday.com] March 14 - Pi Day [www.piday.org]	June 5 - World Environment Day [www.unep.org/wed] June 21 - World Humanist Day
Autumn Equinox (N Hemisphere), Spring Equinox (S Hemisphere)	Winter Solstice (N Hemisphere), Summer Solstice (S Hemisphere)	March 16 - Freedom of Information Day March 16-22 - Sunshine Week [www.sunshineweek.org]	Summer Solstice (N Hemisphere), Winter Solstice (S Hemisphere)
September 23 - Banned Book Week [www.ala.org/bbooks] September 30 - International Blasphemy Day [www.blasphemyday.com]	December 23 - Festivus December 23 - HumanLight Celebration [www.humanlight.org]	Spring Equinox (N Hemisphere), Autumn Equinox (S Hemisphere)	July 1 - Chevalier de la Barre July 4 - Indivisible Day
October 1-31 - Freethought Month October 12 - Freethought Day [freethoughtday.org]	January 1-31 - New Year Reality Revival January 29 - Thomas Paine Day	April 1 - April Fool's Day April 12 - Yuri's Night, or Cosmonaut's Day [yurisnight.net] April 22 - Earth Day [www.earthday.net]	August 11 - Ingersoll Day
November 24-28 - Church/State Separation Week	February 12 - Darwin Day [www.darwinday.org]	May (1 st Thursday) - National Day of Reason [www.nationaldayofreason.org]	

For more information about secular holidays, check out [\[www.secularseasons.org\]](http://www.secularseasons.org) or check out SSA's list at [\[www.secularstudents.org/node/2590\]](http://www.secularstudents.org/node/2590). For suggested Secular Holiday Activities consult [\[www.secularstudents.org/node/2591\]](http://www.secularstudents.org/node/2591).

For a breakdown of timing activities based on a model school year, peruse the Sample Year [\[www.secularstudents/sampleyear\]](http://www.secularstudents/sampleyear).

Superstition Bash:

Instructions from Paul Youk of Individuals for Freethought at Kansas State University:

"Superstition Bashes [\[www.secularstudents.org/node/2531\]](http://www.secularstudents.org/node/2531) are generally held on Friday the 13th. Essentially, students get together and break widely held superstitions. This is a good way to publicize your group and your anti-superstitious/mystical sentiments in a way that is both light-hearted for the public and fun for you personally.

Break various superstitions:

- Walk under ladders (including "ladder limbo")
- Step on cracks
- Kiss under umbrellas
- Spill salt
- Break a mirror at 13:13 (military time), or between class periods
- Take pictures of groups of three (the person in the middle is supposed to die first!)
- Give "psychotic readings" if you have anyone that is satirically and theatrically talented in your organization
- Pass out 'misfortunes' (opposed to the fortunes found in fortune cookies.) such as 'Ancient Chinese secret: You're screwed.' Google "misfortune cookies" for many more examples
- Any other superstition you know of that you can break



Wishing Darwin a Happy Birthday!

Road Trips

What's college without a road trip? From visiting your freethought fellows at neighboring campuses, to cultural oddities and national conferences, there are a million excuses to go on a road trip. Wherever you go, don't forget a camera!

There are around ten national freethought organizations that have annual conferences and some offer free admission or travel grants to students. Odds are your school might offer some travel money as well. Conferences are a fantastic way to get to know other freethinkers from all generations.

Small groups in particular really benefit from regional networking. Groups can take road trips to events on nearby campuses, thus pooling resources instead of trying to hold many of their own events. There are also occasionally large freethought demonstrations. The biggest one in recent memory (and perhaps ever) was the Godless Americans' March on Washington, organized by American Atheists. It was in November of 2002 in Washington, D.C. on the mall. It was estimated that as many as 2,000 freethinkers attended. The SSA helps to keep its affiliates informed about events like this.



James Madison University Freethinkers pose at the Godless Americans March on Washington.

There are also many goofy, fun social activities that make a good road trip excuse! Going camping, skiing, or to the beach, as well as attending music and other festivals are all fun community building experiences. Another option is to go “see the sights” in your region or state. For low cost housing options, try looking at local youth hostels and campgrounds before staying in a hotel. Or get in touch with another SSA group in the area to see if you can couch surf!



Taking the Secularmobile out for a spin...

Types of Road & Field Trips
[www.secularstudents.org/node/2547]

Links to Conferences & Conventions
[www.secularstudents.org/node/2546]

Section 6 | Last Minute Meetings

If you have weekly meetings, you can't make every meeting a “big event.” Occasionally whatever you planned for your meeting will not work out (no projector, speaker doesn't show, etc.). Rather than canceling your meeting, here are some ideas you can use at the last minute.

- Movie/debate showing. Make sure it is good quality and interesting to the group.
- “Clip” showing, where members are invited to email their favorite videos/clips which are compiled and shown (if the room you are meeting in has internet, you can do this on the spot using YouTube).
- Take your group to attend another event (for example, if there is a panel on “religion and issue 'x'” then have members from your group attend that, or go visit the meeting of another relevant group who meets on the same night).
- Make your weekly meeting a social event instead of whatever was planned (consult the “Social Events” section).

Chapter 5: Events

Chapter 5
Sections Spotlight:
Speakers
Multi-Speaker Events
Activism &
Demonstrations
Service

All of the **links** in this guide
can be found **online** at
[www.secularstudents.org/grglinks]



The Freethought Books Project was started by Leslie Zukor and the Reed College Freethinkers. The project aims to let inmates, mental institutions, and charitable organizations know that there is an alternative to the fundamentalist perspective on how to be a productive citizen with a moral compass.

Section 1 | Speakers

Overview: Types of Speakers

Professors: Take advantage of what you have! When you think of a topic that you might like to have discussed at a meeting, resources at your own university can cover anything from astronomy to zoology. The departments of philosophy, comparative religion, anthropology, psychology, and biology are also great places to start looking for someone to speak at your meeting. Many faculty members have websites that list their areas of interest / research or literature they have published. Also, think of professors that you've had, or ask friends if they've had any professors who would make excellent speakers for your group. Your advisor may be a great speaker, or have recommendations of other faculty members to ask. If you don't have at least two professors from your school speak per academic term, you're doing something wrong.

Big Name Speakers: The well-known names in the freethought movement. Whether partnering with your university's lecture series or bringing in speakers from the SSA Speakers Bureau these speakers are appropriate for big events that you may put on once or twice a year.

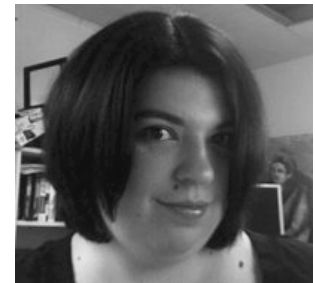
Local Chapter Members or Leaders: You can invite leaders from local chapters of freethought organizations such as the American Humanist Association or American Atheists, or from freethought-related groups, such as the Unitarian Universalist Church and the Society of humanistic Judaism to speak.

Special Interest Groups: You can invite special interest organizations to talk at your meetings, such as having an animal rights activist talk about the ethics of eating meat, or having a representative from a civil rights organization talk about affirmative action. There are student versions of many of these organizations right on your campus.

Students: Often student members themselves may want to do presentations. Be sure they're up to doing proper research and have adequate public speaking skills. If you are having a bigger speaker come in the next few weeks, one student who is well-informed on the person could present to the group about him or her to get everyone excited.

Sharon Moss, former President of Students for Freethought at The Ohio State University gives this advice on presenters:

"We have had presentations given on two different topics by members that went really poorly, but I don't think it was the topics. Rather, the presenters didn't prepare well, and were very nervous to be in front of the group... to the point where people walked out of the meeting. I think that if you let members present you have to be sure that they really can do it, and perhaps help them come up with ways to engage the group better, such as using Power Point, or having other multimedia available."



Sharon Moss

Approaching a Professor, Freethought or Special Interest Group Leader

People love to talk about their work. Most professors and activist group leaders are happy to come and speak for student groups, regardless of their religious affiliation. Contact the potential speaker by phone or in person if at all possible. E-mail may be a good way to make a first contact, but it should be followed up by a phone call to confirm if a reply is not received in twenty-four hours. Despite the fact that it's the 21st century, some people have still not made email a part of their daily lives. Ask speakers how they prefer to keep in touch.

Before contacting a potential speaker, keep the following in mind: several options for dates (remember Friday events are not usually well attended), and a general idea of a topic on which you would like him/her to speak. Be clear about your group and your group's purpose. Answer any questions the speaker may have honestly, and try to be flexible with his/her schedule. Explain the general flow of your meeting. For example, if your meeting begins at 7:30pm, but you have 15 minutes of announcements, let the speaker know that he/she will begin his/her talk at 7:45pm.

One week before the person is scheduled to speak, call or e-mail them making sure everything is still on track for the presentation. In the morning on the day before the presentation ask them again. Speakers sometimes forget or have things come up that overwhelm them and may forget to tell you they can't make it. You have a responsibility to come up with an alternative meeting if the speaker doesn't show.

Most importantly, after someone has come to speak to your group, send a follow up thank you email or card. The impression that your group makes on him/her may influence other people's decisions to come speak to your group, and your group's public image. The speaker may tell his/her colleagues what a wonderful bunch of heathens you all are.

What has been your most successful meeting?

Sharon Moss, former President of Students for Freethought at The Ohio State University:

"I think that the most successful meeting this year was having Dr. Bruno (Prof. Biopsychology, OSU) speak about stem cell research. It was truly amazing how much the media and the religious right have clouded what the public knows about stem cells. The presentation also touched on how scientists need to become more politically motivated to counter the misinformation out there on many topics. This was a meeting that was talked about long after it ended."

Using the SSA Speakers Bureau

The SSA has a Speakers Bureau of freethought personalities who have graciously offered to speak/present/debate on your campus. You can view the current list of speakers and their biographies here [www.secularstudents.org/speakers].

If you are interested in inviting a particular speaker to your campus, contact the SSA's Campus Organizer at [organizer@secularstudents.org]. Each speaking request is taken on a case by case basis and subject to the schedule/availability of the speaker.

The SSA may be able to provide a few hundred dollars directly to the speaker for travel and lodging. Remember, if this is going to be a public or school-wide event, it is possible that you may be able to get advertising money, flyers, and other funds through your university and / or student activities board. In most cases, your group won't need to pay a thing. If we're flying someone across the country to speak to your group, we might need your group to help cover expenses. As we have speakers spread all over the country, this shouldn't be a problem often. Alas, we're unlikely to be able to fund international travel with the possible exceptions of Canada or Mexico.

We ask that you do your very best to advertise the event and are eager to help you plan this. We also ask that you take pictures of the event and give us a short write-up that we can publish on our website.

If you would like to bring a "big name" speaker to your campus who is not on the Speakers Bureau, you can still contact the SSA's campus organizer for help. The SSA has connections to and/or contact information for many important speakers you might want to bring to your campus.

Getting Organized

One of the most popular events our groups put on is bringing a speaker to their campus. Whether the speaker the leader of a local freethought chapter or Richard Dawkins, these events always engage communities, spark discussion, educate the public and build momentum for our groups.

However, we understand that planning such an event - especially for the first time - can be daunting. That's why we've developed a new resource to help your group plan its event - the **Speaker Event Planning Checklist!** Designed for use by groups of all experience levels, the Checklist helps in every stage of planning from the first stages of brainstorming all the way through wrapping up loose ends after the event itself.



Michael Shermer was kind enough to pose with Students For Freethought when he came to speak to them. Get a group photo with big speakers if you can.

The Speaker Event Planning Checklist is a thorough, detailed list of the steps involved in bringing a speaker to your campus. New groups will appreciate the level of detail and instruction, while more experienced leaders might just use the condensed cover sheet to keep track of their planning progress.

We used input from student groups, current and past leaders, our own staff members, and speakers from our Speakers Bureau to create this resource. Our writers and editors have had years of group-running and event-planning experience between them; they've made plenty of mistakes and learned lots of tricks. Now we're able to share that knowledge with you so that you can put on the best event possible!

Speaker Event Planning Checklist
[www.secularstudents.org/speakerchecklist]

Sample Year
[www.secularstudents.org/sampleyear]

No matter how many or what kind of speaker your group is inviting, our Speaker Event Planning Checklist addresses the planning process and necessary steps from start to finish. Another good resource for gauging when to start planning for and implementing events is the Sample Year.

Section 2 | Multi-Speaker Events

Debates

When planning for a debate, remember many of the tips described in the section on “Speakers.” You are, in essence, planning for more than one speaker.

People love a good fight. Because of this, debates can bring people out to events about topics they would otherwise never come to see. Debates are likely to be the largest events you run. Many group leaders shy away from debates precisely because they are fights. They worry that freethinkers and religious folk are already too divided and that debates are only going to make things worse.

These are legitimate worries, but far from the whole picture. First off, debates aren't really fights. They have a competitive element, but no one in a public debate without formal judges really wins or loses. At the end of the debate, the debaters will likely smile at each other and shake hands. They may even go out to dinner together afterwards! Also, how wonderful would it be if all disagreements could be settled with words rather than blows? The world is full of competition—we might as well model nonviolent competition. To keep things from getting ugly, find a facilitator who knows how to calm things down; an experienced moderator can help to keep the climate respectful and productive.



Matthew LaClair moderates the panel discussion “Morality Without Gods Part 2” put on by the Atheists, Agnostics, and Freethinkers at New York University.

Before deciding to hold a debate, you may want to assess the social climate of your school to ensure this would be appropriate. For example, some smaller schools or communities would likely prefer a panel discussion or “Controversial Discussion.” These set a somewhat different tone for the event, while still getting across the idea that people with different opinions on an issue will be arguing for their ideas.

Debates are really about raising interest and breeding familiarity.

Few people that come to a debate will change their view—at least not because of the debate itself. The debate will encourage many people that attend to take more interest in the subject at hand. Competition makes people passionate and when people get passionate they tend to listen, talk, read, and write more. This is a good thing. Hopefully the debate will let attendees know some of the major arguments on each side, and be able to explore the topic with more perspective than before.

Also, attendees will actually get to see people they don't agree with. Some folks have never met someone who is openly atheist before. This could be that person's first chance. It is also quite likely that freethought folk might learn a bit about people who are different from them. Even if we don't all agree, we do have to share this world, and spending time together in the same room is a good start.

Debaters

There are lots of sources for debaters. Academic departments are a potential source, and SSA has several debaters on our Speakers Bureau [www.secularstudents.org/speakers]. However, be aware that knowing a lot about a topic and being a smart person does not necessarily translate into being a good debater. Excellent public speaking skills are required, along with the ability to think on one's feet. Debate experience is critical. There are a handful of folks who are happy to debate on the side of the freethought point of view. If you are having trouble finding people, contact the SSA or contact some of the groups in the directory in this guide. A Sample Debate Format written by Dan Barker can be found at [www.secularstudents.org/node/2397].

Panel Discussions

Get a bunch of (three to five) experts on something and put them in a room together. For instance, during a Presidential election, it's great to gather together student representatives from several political parties to express their views on various political issues. These meetings can be a good deal of work (since you're dealing with several speakers, not just one). Your group must find not only great speakers, but an excellent moderator who can keep everything under control. If you can set them up properly, panel discussions can be fantastic.

Ask an Atheist Activity Packet
[www.secularstudents.org/node/2537]

Thoughts on Ask an Atheist Events
[www.secularstudents.org/node/1237]

Reflection on an Ask an Atheist Panel
[www.secularstudents.org/node/240]

Organizing These Events

Topic

Now that you and your group have decided to have a debate or panel discussion, what should the topic be? If you are cosponsoring with another campus group, then obviously the other group will have input on the topic. Many events are related to the God question, but don't limit yourself to just that - there are an infinite number of possibilities. Try to tie in current events if possible. There may be history or law professors at your school who would be interested in discussing the secular nature of U.S. government and history. Common debate and discussion topics include: "Is America a Christian Nation," "Does God Exist," "Stem Cell Research," and "Domestic Surveillance."

To Cosponsor or Not

Many freethought groups have limited resources. By comparison, many Christian campus groups have huge budgets and numerous resources available to them. Some groups choose to approach a campus student group (such as Campus Crusade for Christ) about cosponsoring an event. Both groups can then split the cost of the facilities, and are responsible for bringing in a debater or panelists for their "side." This approach also lends a great deal of credibility to the event. You should cosponsor unless you have a really good reason not to.

What Students Have to Say:

Mike Fox, University of Delaware: "We hosted a debate between Rob Boston of Americans United and Peter Lillback of the Westminster Theological Seminary over church-state separation issues. With a public turnout of 150 people, it was our most successful event from last year."

Charlie Lopez, Wabash College: "We co-sponsored a seminar discussion on 'Religion and Meaning in Life' with both the Newman Club here at Wabash and nearby Purdue University's Campus Crusade for Christ. Both events turned out successful with over 150 people in attendance between them."



He's got the right idea.

Section 5 | Activism & Demonstrations

This movement stretches beyond college campuses, crossing state boundaries and international borders. Political participation as students can affect your community, the country, and the entire world. The SSA wants you to realize that our mission goes beyond college campuses. What can you do to make a difference? Sometimes activism can be a subset of road trips, but you might be astonished at what demonstration opportunities exist in your own town. You might even be able to get nearby freethinkers from other campuses to join you. A salient example is the Godless Americans March on Lansing. The Michigan State Freethinkers Alliance was only a short drive from this event, but Students for Freethought at OSU drove for five hours to attend the event. Much to the delight of the Michigan State Atheist organizers, both groups had speakers at the event.

Note: Many campuses require prior notice and approval for demonstrations, and restrict the place, time, and manner in which they can be conducted; regulations in high schools can be especially limiting. Review your school's policies before planning something, and consider alternative ways of promoting your message. Concerns about unduly restrictive policies can be referred to the American Civil Liberties Union, the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education and, of course, Secular Student Alliance.

Encourage group members to subscribe to action alerts through the Secular Coalition of America website [www.secular.org]. This system will notify you by e-mail to contact legislators on key votes, and also provides scorecards of Congressional votes on secular issues.

The American Civil Liberties Union
[aclu.org]

The Foundation for Individual
Rights in Education
[thefire.org]

Secular Student Alliance
[organizer@secularstudents.org]

Secular Coalition Action Alerts
[www.secular.org/activism]

What Should My Group Get Angry About?

- Discrimination against atheists, the non-religious, and minority faiths
 - If a group member or local freethinker is discriminated against on account of their nonbelief, you can contact the Anti-Discrimination Support Network [www.fsgp.org/anti-discrimination-support-ne], which can provide them with counseling and legal support.
- Preachers of intolerance and hate (e.g., Westboro Baptist Church)
- Creationism and intelligent design in schools
- Religious invocations at commencement
 - Some case histories of groups who have challenged graduation prayers are collected at [www.secularstudents.org/node/2610].
- National Day of Prayer
 - Atheists celebrate the alternative, the National Day of Reason by holding blood drives [www.secularstudents.org/node/2542] and protests.
- Religious Demonstrations that Restrict Civil Liberties
 - Reproductive rights
 - Gay rights
 - Religious requirements for group membership (e.g. Boy Scouts of America)
- Government establishment of religion
 - If you're interested in challenging the legality of a religious display in your area, the Freedom from Religion Foundation [ffrf.org] can offer advice and assistance.

What Can My Group Do About [Insert Issue Here]?

If you're going to do something about issues in your community, here is a three-step model to follow:

Get Educated

It's not just enough to know that something's wrong. You need to know why it's wrong, how it got that way, and how to fix it. You and your group can educate yourselves in a variety of ways – reading up on current events, local and national, is easier than ever in the age of the Internet. Activist groups on and off campus are simply chomping at the bit to tell you about their causes – try contacting them for information, or even invite them to speak at your meetings! There may also be professors on your campus who are studying the problem you are trying to address – reach out to them as well.

Get Organized

Now that a core cadre of community organizers (your group) wants to do something about an issue, you need to plan a campaign for change. This doesn't mean giving yourselves titles, but rather identifying how your group can create the change you want. It also means making your campus and community painfully aware of the issue at hand. Raising awareness, while a long, challenging process, can in time attract supporters and produce change.

Get Results

Now that you have some grassroots support, you need to get what you want. If you're trying to sway those in power to your side – say, to change a school policy, support a piece of legislation, or get your town council to pass a resolution – lobbying is the way to go! Our Lobbying & Political Activism activity packet has a number of ideas and suggestions for making substantive headway in this area.

At times the tactics listed above won't work, or don't fit the situation. For instance, a fundamentalist preacher simply won't listen to a petition demanding gay rights, and a school administration may be unwilling to support a policy without massive visible support for it. In these instances, demonstrations and protests can get your message out in public, loudly, albeit in a less focused manner.



MSUFAers at the Godless Americans March on Lansing.

Online Resources

Lobbying & Political Activism

(Letter-Writing Campaigns, Petitions, Calling Legislators / Phonebanking, Action Alerts, Dorm-Raps / Canvassing, Leafleting, Letters to the Editor / Op-Eds, Meeting with Elected Officials & Staff, Proposals & Resolutions, Public Hearings / Town Hall, Rallies, Polling & Referendums, Voter Registration)

Demonstrations & Protests

(Protest marching & picketing, Sit-ins, Teach-ins, Soapboxing, Banner Dropping, Balancing Something Bad with Good)

Activist Resources

(Campus Publicity Techniques, Communicating with Decision Makers on Campus, Educational Tactics, Engaging the Religious Right, Event Planning, FAQ's and Fact Sheets, Leafleting in High Schools, Organizing a Campaign for Change, Petition Strategy Guide, Rallies, Research, Working with Legislators)

Lobbying & Political Activism
[www.secularstudents.org/node/2563]

Demonstrations & Protests
[www.secularstudents.org/node/2541]

Activist Resources
[www.secularstudents.org/node/2575]

Section 6 | Service

The SSA strongly encourages its affiliates to engage in community service. Some benefits of engaging in service include:

- Embodiment of our values through improvement of our world
- A stronger bond among those who participate in service
- A deeper understanding of people whose lives may be very far removed from the setting of the academy
- People outside the organization get a face to associate with our under-represented worldview
- Networking and community building with other organizations
- Great opportunities for members to invite a friend or two along to help

Almost all campuses have a student organization in charge of finding worthwhile service projects for other student groups. If you don't already know what group this is on our campus, ask your campus office of student organizations. They will be happy to point you in the right direction.

If your group is still young, exercise some caution during your first few service events. Try to participate in an event where your group is not the whole show. Odds are that at least a couple of people that tell you they will be there are going to bail on you. Make sure that your event doesn't turn into a disaster because of it. If you decide to do a joint service project with another organization, think about co-sponsoring with a religious group. Then you get added social and networking benefits on top of the benefits of volunteering. Another tactic is simply to assign someone from your group to research individual service opportunities and present a short list of them to the group at meetings.

A specific service opportunity that many young freethinkers find especially appealing is volunteering at Camp Quest. Camp Quest is the first residential summer camp for atheist, agnostic, humanist, skeptic and other freethinking kids. Camp Quest started in Kentucky, and then moved to Ohio. Additional camps have sprung up in Tennessee, Michigan, Minnesota, California, Florida, Canada and the UK, and more may come about shortly. The camps typically run from seven to nine days. They don't pay, but they do provide free lodging and food for the duration of camp.

Serve.gov

Provided by the Corporation for National and Community Service, this site endeavors to urge Americans to service. Their site states, "Serve.gov is your online resource for not only finding volunteer opportunities in your community, but also creating your own. Use [Serve.gov] to help you do your part. America's foundation will be built one community at a time – and it starts with you." This site features handy ways to register your event, find volunteers, or to search for events in your area. A great way to cultivate a responsible, ethical reputation for nontheists and freethinkers as well as to become involved in your own community.

Event Ideas:

- **Adopt a Highway** to beautify your community and get your name out there. You get to put your organization name or logo on a sign that community members will drive by every day!
- **Blood Drives** are a great way to make a difference! Some clever ways to advertise this could be "Give Up Blood for Lent" or the "Vampire Feast Blood Drive."
- **Relay for Life** teams, **Dance-a-thon** teams or **Trivia Night** teams of members from your group can raise money for different charities or causes.
- **Service Trips** can be taken over spring break or any other break. You could go with a religious group or another SSA affiliate.
- **Volunteer** with local agencies, either on a regular basis or as a one-time event. Some good secular causes might be: tutoring at a high school or working with the local forest preserve or park districts. Or volunteer your time helping local freethought groups.

Service Opportunities Galore!

Service Projects
[www.secularstudents.org/node/2543]

List of non-Religious Charities
[www.secularstudents.org/node/2556]

Adopt a Highway
[www.adoptahighway.com]

Blood Drive Activity Packet
[www.secularstudents.org/node/2542]

Blood Drive: Day of Reason – Article
[www.secularstudents.org/node/671]

Blood Drive: Day of Reason – at OSU
[www.secularstudents.org/node/775]

Camp Quest
[www.camp-quest.org]

Dance-a-thon Team: U Kentucky
[www.secularstudents.org/node/1901]

Relay for Life
[www.relayforlife.org]

Read Religious Texts for Charity
[www.secularstudents.org/node/2549]

Spring Break Service Trip
[www.secularstudents.org/node/2632]

Religious Group Collaboration
[www.secularstudents.org/node/2555]

Local Collaboration Guides
[www.secularstudents.org/collaboration]

How to Come Up With a Service Project:

- What is your organization's mission? What types of activities can you do to strengthen that mission?
- Determine if there is a need in your community that is not being met.
- What do you have money for? Can you do something that costs nothing?
- Survey your members during meetings to see what they would be interested in doing.
- What have other groups successfully done in the past?
- Is the group aware of any projects going on in the community or on campus?
- Put it up to vote so that members are involved in the decision-making process.

Hints

- Make sure that you choose something that everyone is interested in doing so that people will show up, not just sign up.
- If collaborating, make sure all groups have equal say and have vocal representatives.
- Keep in mind time constraints for all participants.
- The SSA does encourage its affiliates to take on controversial issues. However, when you're participating in outreach it is sometimes best to pick something neutral that everyone can support. You are trying to establish relationships with the community and trying to appeal to the greatest number of people. If you choose something controversial, you may turn people off and the message may get lost.
- You do not have to come up with something on your own. There are plenty of opportunities to get involved in your community that already exist. There are organizations to get involved with, projects to do, and volunteer opportunities to take advantage of.

Did your group pull off an amazing, transformative service project? Apply for our Best Service Project Award! The winning group will get \$300.00 as part of the award! More information and the award application can be found at [\[www.secularstudents.org/best\]](http://www.secularstudents.org/best).

High School Outreach

Do you remember what it was like to be an atheist / agnostic / humanist / skeptic in high school? The SSA often gets requests from students in high schools and even middle schools who feel isolated, frustrated, and lost. It is difficult for the SSA to get in touch with these students because of legal issues, but we don't want to leave them high and dry. Your group could help these frustrated high school students by participating in a high school outreach program. Make sure you understand that you cannot go to high school campuses and solicit students! You also cannot flyer schools. However, there are plenty of ways to get in touch with these students and reach out.

What Can You Do?

- Word of mouth is extremely useful in this respect. Does anyone in your group have a younger brother or sister interested in the movement? Does anyone in a local organization have a child, niece, nephew, sibling, etc. interested in freethought?
- Advertise on your web site. Have a section that high school students can go to that has a link to the SSA.
- Flyer local businesses where high school students will see them (coffee shops, music stores, etc.), or put ads in a local newspaper.

Then What?

- Invite interested high school students to attend your meetings
- Invite them to attend events
- Put the student in touch with the SSA so we can send them a Group Starting Packet or answer any questions they have
- Appoint someone in your group (an education student is a good choice) who will serve as an intermediary / liaison between your group(s) and the high school group. This person should:
 - Keep in close contact with the high school group to make sure they don't collapse
 - Help plan events and joint projects
- Encourage high school students to start their own groups when they go to college



University of Illinois Atheist, Agnostics, and Freethinkers with their 2008 Best Service Project Award. These annual awards are given out at the SSA yearly conference to groups who do outstanding work.

Chapter 6: Support & Collaboration

Chapter 6
Sections Spotlight:
Collaboration:
Secular Groups
Collaboration:
Religious Groups
Additional
Support & Resources

All of the **links** in this guide
can be found **online** at
[www.secularstudents.org/grglinks]



Secular students from four continents working together at the 2008 AHA-IHEU-SSA conference in Washington, D.C.

Section 1 | Collaboration: Secular Groups

Collaboration & Networking, On and Off-Campus

Oftentimes, one city or area will be home to a student group and one or more adult (i.e. off-campus) groups. However, in many cases these groups rarely communicate and sometimes are not even aware of each other. SSA intends to foster collaboration between secular groups in the same geographical area (city, state, region), with a focus on connecting student groups with off-campus groups in the community. These relationships are beneficial to all involved, whether connecting one college group to one off-campus group in a small city, or connect dozens of likeminded organizations state-wide.

The full text of **The Student Group's Guide to Collaboration** can be found at www.secularstudents.org/node/2326.

Why Collaborate?

There are many ways your group can benefit from collaboration from other organizations. You can host joint events (allowing for shared expenses), increase attendance, and obtain more well-known speakers. You will have more people to implement service projects and political activism, a larger pool from which to draw donations and support, and many potential members. An established off-campus group can provide a source of stability for your student group, aiding in the sometimes rough leadership and membership transitions. An off-campus group often (though not always) has more resources than a student group, and may be able to help alleviate financial burdens. Off-campus groups often have experience planning events and can offer assistance and guidance.

Collaborating with an adult group also creates an environment in the freethought world in which college graduates are comfortable. One of the biggest challenges facing the SSA is the graduation of its students – most simply disappear from the movement. Your participation in this program will make it easier and more comfortable for you to stay involved after you graduate. The central goal of collaborative efforts is to create a freethought movement that spreads outward from a local level.

How to Proceed:

1. Investigate your area to see if there is already a network or collaborative effort in place.
2. Investigate your area to find freethought groups. Check with national organizations to see if they have local chapters. The list of SSA Partner Organizations online may be a good starting point: www.secularstudents.org/partners.
 - Contact the United Coalition of Reason www.unitedcor.org to see if there is already a coalition in your area. It is important to email info@unitedcor.org or call them {1.866.897.7248} because they often have several local coalitions which they are working on which may not yet be listed on their website.
 - Use Google, ask your faculty advisor, and check local newspapers or gathering places (bookstores and libraries are popular) to find local groups.
3. Designate one or two officer(s) or a committee to be in charge of collaborative effort. Remember to delegate!
4. Contact local freethought group leaders and let them know what you are interested in doing:
 - Adults may not be as receptive to emails as students – don't be afraid to pick up the phone!
 - Be prepared to explain any goals, activities, and methods you have in mind.
5. Ask if you can attend one of their meetings:
 - Set up a time to meet with the group leaders before or after the meeting to discuss collaboration.
 - If possible show a short presentation about your campus group (or proposed network) at this meeting.
6. Encourage the group to take an active role by inviting the leader(s) to speak at your next campus meeting.
7. Invite the entire off-campus group to attend an event, talk or discussion that your group is hosting.
8. Volunteer your time by helping with an event or participating in a project that the off-campus group is planning.
9. Continue communicating and participating in one another's events until a strong relationship is established.
10. Maintain the relationship!

What now?

After a few events, you should have a good relationship with the other group(s) in your area. With your combined numbers, you have lots of opportunities available. Consider when to hold joint events; breaks aren't the best time for students, and weekdays are difficult for off-campus members with day jobs.

Engage in community service, civic participation, and activism. This type of work can solidify bonds among student members as well as between students and local off-campus participants, and can contribute to a sense of community among freethinkers. It is

also fulfilling work that can aid with recruitment and improve the image of both your groups and the movement. Make sure that you choose something that everyone is interested in doing and that both groups have equal say and vocal representatives.

Off-campus groups likely love a party just as much as you do! Social events are great for getting your members to know one another. Socializing with older freethinkers will help students become more comfortable in the adult freethought world, making your members less likely to drop out of the movement after graduation. You may also begin to make the networking connections that can lead to internships, jobs and other opportunities in the freethought movement. Check out the activity packet for a Progressive Organizations Mixer at [www.secularstudents.org/node/2530].

Broader Scale

Students won't be in college forever, but those who are more deeply involved in the movement tend to continue their activities after graduation. Therefore it is a good idea to become members of other freethought organizations as a student. Many of these organizations offer internships and job opportunities that may be appealing after graduation and some offer reduced or free memberships for college students and alumni. Some organizations provide students with grant opportunities, speakers, legal assistance, useful materials, personal assistance, and guidance. Many also hold annual conferences and retreats, and send out newsletters and/or magazines to their affiliate groups. Also consider organizations that may be sympathetic. Groups such as The Society for Humanistic Judaism, Unitarian Universalist churches, and Americans United for the Separation of Church and State can all be valuable groups for students and alumni to become involved in.

Humanist Chaplains / Counselors



Greg Epstein

A Humanist chaplain is an individual who counsels students from a nontheistic perspective. Chaplaincies are still somewhat rare, but they are a great resource, as well as a possible career path! There are already chaplaincies at:

Adelphi University [students.adelphi.edu/sa/ifc/humanist.php]
Columbia University [www.columbia.edu/cu/ehc]
Harvard University [www.harvardhumanist.org]
Rutgers University [rutgershumanist.org]

These chaplains usually work within universities to counsel students, present speeches, provide programs and activities, and act as resources for humanist students. The Harvard Humanist Chaplaincy held a conference in 2007 which drew humanist students from around the country. If there is a chaplaincy at your school, your chaplain(s) are probably a great resource and would likely be willing to act as an advisor or otherwise help your group.

Students at other universities may find help from chaplaincies by setting one up at their own school. If your university or group is interested in starting a chaplaincy, contact the SSA so that we can point you in the right direction.

Section 2 | Collaboration: Religious Groups

There are a number of activities where you'll want to cooperate with religious or other non-aligned groups. These types of collaborations can create unique problems and misconceptions, but the benefits far outweigh the risks! There are many things to consider when cultivating relationships and planning events with religious groups:

Approach

- Figure out your purpose in working with them. Is it for service, discussion, understanding, or for a variety of these?
- Don't have plans to (de)convert the other side. Don't expect to change deeply held beliefs.
- Come to them as an ambassador with an open mind. Focus on the positive reasons for working together and honestly let them know what your positions are.
- Keep in mind that not all groups are interested in collaboration. Don't let this discourage you!

Getting Along

- Your biggest initial challenge will be hesitation from both sides. If things are working, the inter-group dynamic will shift as you collaborate.
- Find common ground on which to collaborate. A meeting with members of both groups may help, especially in forming a list of things to work on.
- There are some activities that are great for collaboration. Generally, these events depend on the contrast between your positions (debates, interfaith discussions) or focus on your common goals (service projects, religious tolerance panels, peace protests).
 - One unusual but effective activity is atheist bible study, where people from both sides read and examine bible passages.
- Never mock or make personal judgments about those you disagree with; you can make your points respectfully and dispassionately.

Potential Conflicts

- Rely on the members of cooperating groups to be self-disciplining, but be honest if you feel unwelcome or discriminated against.
- Within your own group there may be some inescapable opposition or lack of cooperation. Motivate your members by emphasizing the benefits of interaction, such as improved image, or accomplishment of particular goals.
- If someone within your group is disruptive, they don't have to participate. As a leader, don't hesitate to stick up for the "other side" when necessary; this may include asking your members to apologize if they've offended someone.
- A good leader should identify and try to resolve conflict early.

Regular Collaborations

- Be sure to thank people from both groups publicly before major events or speakers.
- Good interactions lead to further good interactions. When appropriately cultivated, these relationships will grow!

Section 3 | Additional Support & Resources

Let's face it - you won't be a college student forever! Part of the reason the SSA stresses collaboration and involvement with other, "adult" freethought groups is because graduates need an idea of what exists beyond the campus grounds. As you begin to adjust to your new life as a non-student, do some exploring to figure out what groups and resources are best for you.

Further Organizational Reading

We hope that your group will change the world. We also hope that this guide points you in the right direction, but we know that it really only scratches the surface. There are several very good books that you might find useful in making your organization truly exceptional. They are aimed at people who are trying to take on the world, not just run a student group. So don't get caught believing you have to do everything in them to have a great group. If you do even a fraction of what's in them, you'll be in excellent shape!

- *Managing a Nonprofit Organization in the Twenty-first Century* by Thomas Wolf and Barbara Carter
- *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* and other works by Malcolm Gladwell
- *Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies* by Jim Collins and Jerry I. Porras
- *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap... and Others Don't* by Jim Collins
- *Fundraising for Dummies* by John Mutz and Katherine Murray

Online Resources / Partner Organizations

The Secular Student Alliance is committed to working closely with the broader freethought community -- after all, the student activists of today are the freethought leaders of tomorrow. The Secular Student Alliance works on a regular basis with the groups listed on our Partner Organizations page: [\[www.secularstudents.org/partners\]](http://www.secularstudents.org/partners).

Humanist Celebrants / Ministers

A humanist celebrant plays a role similar to that of a traditional clergy person, conducting humanist, nonreligious, and inter-religious weddings, commitments / same-sex unions, memorials, baby namings, and other life cycle ceremonies.

Humanist celebrants are legally recognized in all states and many countries and are accorded the same rights and privileges granted by law to priests, ministers, and rabbis of traditional theistic religions. Marriage laws vary by state in the U.S.; contact your local county clerk's office for the most accurate legal information.

More information about celebrants and a link to find a celebrant can be found on the Humanist Society website at [www.humanist-society.org/celebrants/index.html].

Epilogue

“The late philosopher Isaiah Berlin believed that, rather than aspire to some Utopian ideal, a society should strive for something else; ‘not that we agree with each other but that we can understand each other. In the end, the cultures that survive will be those that are willing and able to embrace the new ones on their terms, while rejecting anything that implies the total violation of their way of life.’”

—M.H. Lakdawala, The Milli Gazette, 2003, [www.milligazette.com]

There are many that say we are locked in a culture war. This may be a true way of thinking. But if we stay focused on the metaphor of war, we are doomed to failure. Wars imply force used to control others. Force of persuasion is perhaps replacing the force of violence, but the essence of war is a lack of consent. We must not wage war upon those who seek to control us with force. Rather we must build a society where their tools of coercion are impotent. Reason, education and alliance building are our best tools. There may be times when force is called for. However, we must remember that the use of force is always a sign that something has gone wrong.

We must also remember that the vast majority of people that fear and oppose atheists, agnostics, Humanists, skeptics and other freethinkers do so out of ignorance. Many of them are already our personal friends, we just need to let them know who we are, what we think, and why. It is by engaging in dialogue with them and building mutual respect that we will best achieve our goals.

Now get to it!



Students and speakers at the Secular Student Alliance 2009 conference in Columbus, Ohio get down with their cephalopod selves!

Secular Student Alliance Quick Reference Guide

Secular Student Alliance website: www.secularstudents.org

Group Running Guide online: www.secularstudents.org/grouprunningguide

List of Clickable Links within this Guide: www.secularstudents.org/grglinks

Starting a Group: www.secularstudents.org/groupstartingpacket

Affiliate Your Group: www.secularstudents.org/affiliate

List of SSA Group Services: www.secularstudents.org/services

List of SSA Affiliate Groups: www.secularstudents.org/affiliates

Like the SSA on Facebook: www.facebook.com/SecularStudents

Follow the Secular Student Alliance on Twitter: www.twitter.com/SecularStudents

Watch our videos on YouTube: www.youtube.com/SecularStudents

Support the Secular Student movement – become a member
of the Secular Student Alliance at www.secularstudents.org/join

Contact us!

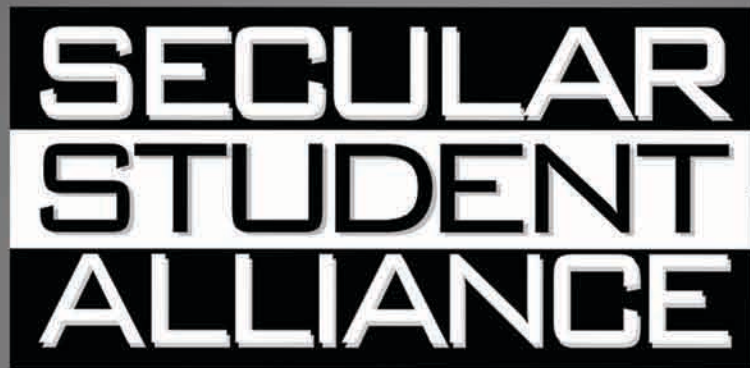
Email: ssa@secularstudents.org

Campus Organizer: organizer@secularstudents.org

Phone: 614-441-9588

Send us mail:

Secular Student Alliance, P.O. Box 2371, Columbus, OH 43216



www.secularstudents.org