

Wellstone

Student Organizing: Effective Meetings

Hosting Your Chapter's First Meeting For General Members

Here's where the nerves may kick in: hosting your first Texas Freedom Network Student Chapter meeting. It's the same fear that has haunted nearly all of us since our first birthday party: what if no one shows up?

Fortunately, a good dose of planning and preparation can go a long way in quelling any anxiety for your chapter's inaugural meeting. What's more, by investing the time into making your first meeting a success, you will leave a lasting impression on those who attend, encouraging them to continue their involvement and building what's bound to be your chapter's stellar reputation as a student group that gets things done. And speaking of getting things done, your officers should be pitching in with these efforts. It's all hands on deck!

One final thought before we dive into the details of making your meeting a success: hosting events can be a powerful tactic to support your strategy. Although we're about to drill down into the minutiae of event planning through the specific lens of campus organizing, the same points we hit upon here – layered advertisement, securing a thoughtful venue, outreach to like-minded organizations, anticipating your attendees needs, having a clear agenda and working in concert with your teammates – are all applicable to any event you'll ever plan within the Wellstone Triangle of community organizing, public policy and electoral politics. Whether organizing a forum to raise awareness about a pressing policy issue in your community or planning a neighborhood block-walk to register voters, follow this guide and your event will be a success – we guarantee it. Now that we've addressed the universal applicability of strong event planning, let's plow forward by using your first chapter meeting on campus as an example to show you how it's done.

Filling The Room

People can't attend a meeting if they don't know it's happening. Here are ways to spread the word and get noticed:

- Pass out fliers the week before, the week of and the day of the meeting.
- Use a simple, professional design for your flyers – less is more.
- Your flyers should be a quarter-page size to cut down on printing costs. These are the



ones you will hand out in classrooms, on campus, in the cafeterias, etc. It's like the old saying goes: "Wherever you go, there you flyer!" Create larger whole-page and half-page flyers to hang around campus in student areas, bathrooms, hallways, classroom doors, staircases, dormitories and wherever else the Student Activities Office allows it.

- Ask your professors to let you make an announcement before class about the chapter and your upcoming meeting. Place a flyer on the overhead or hand them out to your fellow students.
- Talk with the leadership of other student organizations and see if they will let you make an announcement about your chapter and upcoming meeting at their next convening.
- Invite all of your friends on Facebook to attend the first meeting and encourage your friends to do the same. You can @mention people to bring attention to the inaugural meeting. Create an official Facebook event page (because if it's on Facebook, it's a thing).

Getting the Room

Although this may seem like a mundane task, selecting the right room is important because it speaks volumes about how seriously you take the chapter, its members and the work. The room should be comfortable, professional and accessible to make a good first impression. Other helpful hints:

- Select and reserve your room early. Depending upon your Student Activities Office, rooms available for student organizations may be limited and consequently may get reserved early. While you're at it, try to reserve the same space for the remainder of the semester for your general meetings.
- Rooms should have technology like a computer, projector, screen and DVD player available for the use of student groups. Make sure you're able to access the technology – whether that means signing out the keys or jotting down a password – and test it out beforehand!

Feeding the Room

"Will there be food?" You'll hear that question often when inviting people to a chapter meeting. Knowing this, plan ahead so you can answer with a resounding "Yes!" Here are tips for feeding the frenzy:

- TFNEF will cover the cost of food for your events – either purchase the food on your own and have TFNEF reimburse you, or ask TFNEF to order food for your meeting. NOTE: Please provide at least 24-hours notice to TFNEF staff for food orders.
- The amount of food provided to attendees each meeting will vary depending upon the type of event you're hosting. For example, having pizza or an equivalent meal is appropriate for the first meeting and special occasions, like officer elections. For other meetings, light refreshments, like bottled water and cookies, nuts, or candy is perfectly fine.
- Always try to provide food that accommodates dietary restrictions or preferences that



members may have, including vegetarian and vegan options.

- Save all receipts! You must have a receipt to be reimbursed.

Organizing the Room

We've all been to those meetings – you know: meetings in which the officers seem to have no control of the room. In these unfortunate instances, the disorganization usually is because the leaders didn't create an agenda beforehand. When running a meeting, an agenda is your roadmap to a meaningful, timely gathering. Agendas help move your meeting forward and provide a sense of direction and purpose, which in turn helps your attendees understand that you respect their time and attention. An agenda for a first Texas Freedom Network Student Chapter meeting includes these discussion items:

1. Welcome
2. Introductions, including officers and their respective roles in the chapter
3. An overview of the chapter's goals, values and mission
4. A brief summary of the challenges facing Texans who value religious freedom, individual liberties and strong public schools
5. New business, including upcoming campaigns and events that attendees should save the dates for, such as future chapter meetings, as well as how they can get more involved
6. Community announcements, including information sharing from other student groups who allowed you to publicize your meeting to their memberships
7. Adjournment

In the weeks leading up to your first chapter meeting, gather with your officers to create your agenda. Include details, such as assigning officers to lead different portions of the agenda and creating brief PowerPoint presentations to supplement the agenda as appropriate. Not only will creating an agenda demonstrate the chapter's commitment to the cause and its members, but it will also build internal confidence amongst your officers as a team. You got this. Now, thanks to your agenda, you got this on paper.

Wowing the Room

The big day has finally arrived. You and your officers have posted flyers across the campus from floor to ceiling, pitched your first chapter meeting in all your classes and handed out flyers to every student in the Jamba Juice line, which is just about every student on campus. You've reached out to other student organizations to let their members know they're welcome at your first meeting, and all your Facebook friends (and their friends, and their friends, and their friends' moms) know about your meeting's event page. The room has been registered for weeks now, the projector works, you've memorized the room's wi-fi password as well as the meeting's agenda, and the pizza delivery person is on the way, complete with gluten-free and vegan pies.



So what's next?

Because you and your officers have advertised your first chapter meeting and diligently recruited students, something amazing happens: people begin to show up. And just like thorough recruitment got people in the door, how you run the first chapter meeting will determine whether students plug into the action and return for next week's meeting. Here's how to make sure they take an active role in your work and keep coming back for more:

- Greet people as they come in. Shake their hands, look them in the eyes and thank them for coming.
- Ask them to take a moment to sign in. Have officers standing with sign-in sheets on clipboards or a table. Sign-in sheets should have space for attendee's first and last names, cell phone numbers, email addresses, mailing addresses, year of birth, and, depending upon how your chapter decides to leverage social media, Twitter handles. While attendees are signing in, officers are making their nametags and handing them agendas. Officers are also responsible for holding on to the sign-in sheets, as those sheets are the chapter's Holy Grail and will be used to build your chapter's member database after the meeting.
- Direct attendees to the food, and point out vegetarian and vegan options.
- If possible, play background music while people are arriving – it breaks the proverbial ice that often accompanies any inaugural meeting when people are first getting to know each other. Playing background music after the meeting has adjourned may also be helpful. It lets attendees know the official meeting is over and they're welcome to relax a little and hang out. Just like it's important for officers to have time to get to know one another without talking business, it's good for your chapter's members to socialize informally as well.

Once people are signed in, have grabbed a bite to eat and had a minute or two to settle, you're ready to begin the meeting. Your agenda is your roadmap, your officers have your back and you have the audience's ear. Speak and be heard – even if your voice shakes.

Keeping The Room

After your first meeting adjourns, you've achieved a major accomplishment: starting a Texas Freedom Network Student Chapter on your campus. Getting people into a room is no small feat. However, neither is keeping their attention, attendance, or allegiance. Remember: your job is to acclimate new and/or younger members to the chapter so they can gradually tackle responsibilities, gain confidence, and eventually take on an officer role. That process begins at the first meeting. With that in mind, following are tactics to retain, engage and empower your members.

