



ORGANIZE A STUDENT MOVEMENT: HANDBOOK 101

“People want politicians who fight for them, not politicians who fight for big money. That’s the core issue.”

— Dr. Zephyr Teachout

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In this toolkit, we explain how you can create a Democracy Matters chapter at your university. You may already be part of a group that wants to address corruption, inequality, and the unfair role of big money in politics. The first step to starting a new campaign is finding others who are just as passionate about defending and strengthening our democracy as you are.

If you are setting up a new group, make sure to register it with your school to qualify for student activities funding. You may need a minimum number of students interested and a faculty member willing to be an advisor. Be prepared to explain the purpose of your group and how it will enhance student life at your school. Registration rules and availability of funding vary by school.

Also, connect with us on Facebook. We are working with partners to build a national movement of students doing what it takes to limit big private money in elections. Signing up with our national DM Campus Coordinators Facebook group helps us support your efforts. We’ll continue to share resources such as fact sheets, stickers, stamps, and posters, and connect you with other student organizers and the media.

A. ORGANIZE A SUCCESSFUL MEETING

Think seriously about your goals for your chapter and how your first meeting will set you up to achieve them. Too many fledgling student organizations bring a crowd to their first meeting, only to lose students' interest at the meeting itself or in the weeks after. The steps that follow are essential for the success of your campaign.

1. DEFINE YOUR OBJECTIVES

For your first meeting, we recommend these five objectives:

1. **Bring together students** in your university who are passionate about getting corporate and private money out of politics and building a more just society.
2. **Educate** them about big money in elections and the need for public financing of campaigns.
3. **Explain the ultimate goal:** to get money out of politics and to build an engaged student political body on campus advocating for that goal on campus, in the local government and community, and nationally.
4. **Hold a discussion** to solicit your attendees' ideas, goals, and concerns. Get their stories!
5. **Lay out your proposed plan of action** for the semester (create an organizing plan with your calendar and your DM Staff Link). Implement input from your group, delegate roles, and schedule your next meeting.

2. PICK THE DATE, TIME, AND PLACE

Plan the meeting to last around 1-1.5 hours. Select a date and time when most students are available and on campus. Check to ensure there are no major events on campus that might conflict with yours.

Think about a location on campus that is easiest for most students to reach (e.g. student union, library, classroom), and reserve the space through the appropriate department at your school. If you can't reserve, then meet on campus in a dorm, a student union, or coffee shop.

3. RECRUIT STUDENTS WHO CARE

Recruitment efforts not only can help you identify like-minded people, but they also can serve as a tool for educating your peers about how money in politics is destroying our democracy.

Build a Diverse Group from Day One

- In planning for your first meeting, think about how to make your group diverse across gender, race, and income groups. Money in politics affects all communities, but in particular it marginalizes the voices of minorities (communities of color especially).
- Don't expect your meeting to be diverse by default. Take the time to reach out to different communities on your campus, invite people to attend, and make everyone feel welcome. Make sure there is space to discuss the issue from a racial and economic justice perspective.

IF YOU BUILD IT, THEY WILL COME:

As you think about how you'd like to run your first meeting, here are some ways to bring people to it:

Reach out to Friends and Acquaintances: Talk to your friends one-on-one and invite them to the meeting, and ask them to commit to coming and bringing someone with them who also might be interested. Remind them the day before or the day of by phone, email, and/or text. Know that up to half the people who committed to come may not show up, so send them an email afterward summarizing the meeting.

Class Announcements: Find classes at your university that likely have students interested in getting big money out of elections (e.g. government, public policy, sociology, political science). Ask the professor in those and YOUR OWN CLASSES if you can make an announcement! Keep it brief, a minute or two at the most, to keep your audience's attention. Also, pass around sign-up sheets before you start, to collect contact information. Don't forget them when you leave. Speak slowly, smile, be confident - you are giving them an opportunity to make a real difference!

Email Listservs: Can you email dorm lists or student groups? Ask for permission before emailing the listservs of any student organizations; pick those that focus on advocacy or political issues. (See appendix pg xiii for sample email). Also go to other organization's meetings and talk to them about how money in politics connects with their issues.

Campus Tabling: Sign up to host a table on your campus and make a BIG sign to tell everyone what your organization is about. Remember to bring pens, clipboards, sign-up sheets, signs, and fact sheets. If you want to make the most impact, stand in front of your table; don't sit behind it. Don't be afraid to speak up to students as they walk by!

Fliers: Put up posters/flyers around campus where students frequently go, such as the student union, library, coffee shops, student store, or dorms (See APPENDIX pg. xiv for sample nier). You may be able to put mini-flyers in student mailboxes also. Posters should not be your primary means of recruitment, as it is the least effective and can be very time-consuming.

Social Media: Create a Facebook group for your campus chapter ie. Democracy Matters @ UNCG - create a Twitter handle that is the same (DM's handle is @democracymatr z) Add all of your friends, invite your classmates, and everyone who signs up to be a part of or is interested in Democracy Matters

A General Tip: Food: Another hint, "If you feed them, they will come..."also applies. Free food will always draw a crowd. Some universities even have listservs that detail all of the free food events on campus for the week. You can provide inexpensive light snacks, cookies, pretzels etc. candy, or popcorn.

4. COLLECT YOUR MATERIALS

- Find out which presentation resources your school can provide in e.g. a smart classroom and gather those things they can't. (e.g., a projector, screen, video equipment, might be obtained from campus services or a co-sponsoring group) Make sure there is a chalkboard, whiteboard, or nupchart and markers for you to post your agenda, contact information, and useful websites, and to brainstorm info and your campaign plan. *Don't forget to*

bring a sign-in sheet to collect attendees' names and contact information.

5. RUN THE MEETING

- Go over your ideas for the meeting with your Staff Link but this is brief overview of a great meeting!

Start with a brief presentation: introduce yourself, the issue, and the campaign, and explain why it's important to YOU.

- Ask your guests to sign the contact sheet so you can update them and keep them involved. Remind them to sign a petition if they haven't already done so. (send all emails to anitak@democracymatters.org to be added to our national Enewsletter also)
- Designate someone to take notes.
- Consider showing the TED talk: We The People and the Republic We Must Reclaim: Lawrence Lessig or The Story of Citizens United v. FEC video (storyofcitizensunited.org) or a short Youtube clip that is relevant get the conversation rolling and make sure people know the basic issue you're focusing on..
- Ask everyone to introduce themselves and to share one or two sentences about why they came to the meeting and what part of the issue they find most interesting or concerning.
- Prepare some questions ahead of a time to start a discussion. Questions might include:
 - What are the problems legal corruption (privatized elections) present for our democracy?*
 - Whose voices get heard and whose voices get ignored when money dominates the democratic process?*
 - Shouldn't elections be considered a public good and therefore publicly funded?*
 - What can we do as students to address the problem on our campus?*

Remember you're providing a space for people to connect, so let others speak!

- **Make sure the meeting is fun!** Feel free to tell jokes and be informal. We want people to do serious work about a serious topic, but you and your group members shouldn't feel it's a chore.

- **Share information** about action campaigns other DM universities are doing around the country - see our list of ideas here: [Action Campaigns](#) Go online to our Facebook group (DM Campus Coordinators) and show other DM organizers what you are doing. Also, ask others for their ideas! Discuss and decide your next steps.

- **Decide who is responsible** for following up with each step. Don't be afraid to let the room be silent for longer than feels comfortable if no one volunteers right away. Sometimes people need time to think through what they want to commit to. Ask specific people if they will do follow up on something. Give everyone a stake in the chapter! You don't want to end up doing all the work yourself. It's more meaningful when everyone has a role to play on your team.

- **Conclude by making sure you have everyone's contact information** and that you share the date, location and time of the next meeting.

- **Ask someone to type up notes** and send them to the group with the things people committed to do before the next meeting (action items) at the top. (This should be shared in

both an email form and on your Facebook group)

- **Send a follow-up email within 24 hours** thanking everyone for coming and sharing the notes with the action items with your next meeting time right at the top. Remind attendees about the next meeting a couple of times.

B. BUILD YOUR TEAM

With your first meeting concluded, hopefully you now have some idea of what your first campaigns are going to look like. To sustain a campaign (and your group!) it's important to delegate leadership roles. This will help build leadership skills within your group and make sure that no one person has too much on their plate. Some of these roles are appropriate for a team; if you have enough people you may want to create committees to execute these same tasks. Do make sure there still one person clearly assigned to each task. We recommend these four positions, but you can adapt them to your own needs:

1. RECRUITMENT COORDINATOR - Vice-President

This coordinator leads “on-the-ground” outreach, personally educating and recruiting students, and collecting petitions on campus. As campus leader, this is part of your main responsibility as well. All team members should help with recruitment as it's critical for everything else you do.

2. COALITIONS AND UNIVERSITY RELATIONS COORDINATOR - Social Media and Secretary

This coordinator and/or committee takes notes and reaches out to 1) other members:

(2) Other student organizations to garner their support (3) Faculty relationship building

3. LOGISTICS COORDINATOR - Treasurer

This coordinator and/or committee oversees the operational details of the campaign's events, from reserving weekly meeting and tabling space to ensuring all of the required resources for an event are available. This includes applying for university funds and overseeing fundraising activities.

4. COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR - Secretary/Press Junkie :)

This coordinator and/or committee oversees outreach to your school newspaper and local newspapers, radio, blogs, and TV stations. They develop a clear campaign message under the guidance of the entire team and assist the recruitment committee in spreading it. They also can help create a website and other materials.

C. CAMPAIGN EXAMPLE: COLLECT SIGNATURES ON PETITIONS

Petitioning on campus is an excellent way to build support for Democracy Matters. It's also simple and easy to do! It allows you to educate people face-to-face and develop a list of people to invite to meetings and events. (See example petitions online @ www.democracymatters.org) Have them

include their emails and PRINT!!

Already, more than two million people have signed petitions to restore fair elections. That's a fantastic start, but we need many more voices to be powerful enough to take our democracy back from corporations and private interests.

1. HOW TO PETITION

We've all been approached by people with clipboards asking us to take a moment to listen to their cause and sign on if we support it. Think about the last time you stopped. What was it about the petitioner's approach that persuaded you to lend your support? Probably he or she was friendly, approachable, and passionate about the issue. Within a few seconds you were able to understand what they were asking for and why, in simple terms that felt relevant to you.

It's that simple. Just be friendly and explain in simple language why you got involved and why it matters. Bring a friend or two! Like most things in life, gathering signatures is more fun to do in good company.

2. WHERE AND WHEN TO PETITION

Go where people at your university congregate, such as the quad, the dining center, or the student union during high-traffic periods such as between classes. You can also wait outside of classes or general lectures likely to have politically minded students attending. If it's a class related to Democracy, Elections, Social Change, or Social Movements or similar topics, ask the professor if you can make an announcement about the petition and your group and pass it around the class.

3. WHAT TO BRING:

- Copies of the petition (<http://www.democracymatters.org/organizing-tools/petitions/>)
- Copies of the fact sheet (Included in your democracy box of materials)
- Clipboard(s) • Pens
- If you are tabling, bring signs to attract attention and engage passersby.
(If you are tabling with your petition: YOU CAN ALSO HAVE STUDENTS SIGN ELECTRONICALLY BY PUTTING YOUR LAPTOP ON THE TABLE WITH YOU.)
- Your Democracy Matters stickers and buttons!

4. HOW TO APPROACH PEOPLE: **IMPORTANT**

Smile and make eye contact. Keep it short and simple. It will be hard to keep people's attention if you offer a long introduction. Some ideas:

- "Hi! Want to help stop corruption of our elections?"
- "Hi! Want to help stop the corporate takeover of our democracy?"
- "Hi! Have a minute to help get big money out of politics?"
- "Hi! Want to stop the 1% from buying our democracy?"

Some people may immediately know what you're talking about and eagerly sign the petition. Be sure to thank them for their support. Others may want more information. Thank them for

asking, and tell them the basics. Invite them to your next meeting! Offer them a copy of the fact sheet/flyer (included in your Democracy Box of materials) if they want to read more, direct them to www.democracymatters.org, where they can learn more and watch videos. You can also tell them to check us out on Facebook!

5. WHAT TO DO WITH COMPLETED PETITIONS:

We want these to be seen by your elected officials. Talk with your staff link about how best to accomplish this both nationally and locally.

6. STRATEGIES FOR MAXIMIZING PETITION SIGNATURES:

- If circulating in a crowd, approach groups of two or more, so several people at once hear your explanation about the petition.
- Have multiple clipboards available, so more than one person can sign at the same time.
- If tabling, stand in front of the table and actively invite people who pass by to sign the petition (compared to sitting silently behind the table, waiting for people to approach you).
- If at a sit-down event, make an announcement about the petition (if appropriate) before circulating the petitions through the audience. This applies to classrooms as well.
- Set personal and collective goals. For example, 50 petition signatures at a weekend event (football game/university sponsored concert/etc or 500 signatures by the end of the month.
- Make sure to ask students to put a star by their names if they'd like to get more involved in your campus group. Follow up with them within 24 hours letting them know how they can engage.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:

Q: What if someone asks a question and I don't know the answer?

A: Share what you do know, have a fact sheet available, and encourage people to visit www.democracymatters.org for more information. You also can offer to take their contact information and get back to them later. Don't guess or make stuff up.

Q: What if someone says they're not interested in signing?

A: That's ok! Some people may not be interested. No matter what, remain polite and try not to spend too much time debating the issue with those who disagree.. Lots of potential petition signers could pass by if you spend a long time talking to one person who isn't going to sign who just wants to debate.

Q: What if someone doesn't want to fill in all of his or her information?

A: Some people, for privacy or other reasons, may not wish to provide all the information requested. At very least, people need to fill in their full name..

If you have any questions, ideas, or additional tips you would like to share, please don't hesitate

to contact anitak@democracymatters.org we are here to support you!

ANSWERING THE CRITICS:

Some people will have questions/arguments about money in politics. Here are a few common ones, answers are on our website: [Answering the Critics](#)

1. I don't want to support corrupt politicians...
2. The rich are always going to win...
3. This has never worked before...
4. I am too busy working to protect the environment, women's/civil rights, health care, voting rights, or global justice...
5. Contributing money is an important way to participate...

See these reports from www.opensecrets.org:

10 things you need to know about \$ in politics:

<http://www.opensecrets.org/resources/dollarocracy/>

10 things they WON'T TELL YOU!

<http://www.opensecrets.org/resources/10things/>

D. CAMPAIGN EXAMPLE: ORGANIZE AN EVENT

Educational events are a great way to help launch a campaign for an amendment. They can include a movie screening, a discussion with an expert or professor who supports campaign finance reform, or something more fun and creative (see below for some ideas). Invite your school paper to cover your event to make sure even those who can't attend hear about it. Also take pictures to post on the DM facebook. (For even more ideas for events, go to <http://www.democracymatters.org/organizing-tools/action-campaigns/>)

1) MOVIE SCREENING

There are a couple of really great films that will educate your audience about the problem of corporate power and money in politics.

1. "Priceless" is a 56-minute film that talks about the broad problem with money in politics linked to food and the environment. It can be viewed for free online at: <http://www.acrreform.org/feature/watch-the-documentary-priceless/>
2. Check out the 8-minute Story of Citizens United (www.storyofcitizensunited.org) video. It's a great discussion starter.
3. There is also a funny 3-minute music video explaining Super PACs at <http://bit.ly/AkJCyM>.
4. TED Talk "We The People and the Republic We Must Reclaim" by Lawrence Lessig: http://www.ted.com/talks/lawrence_lessig_we_the_people_and_the_republic_we_must_reclaim?language=en

5. Many more suggested documentaries and short films are listed online:
<http://www.democracymatters.org/organizing-tools/recommended-films/>

2) SPEAKER

Inviting a speaker who knows about the issue of money in politics, ESPECIALLY a professor who is an expert in the area, is one way to reach more people. Before you invite someone to speak, research or talk to them first about their views on campaign finance reform. You don't want to pour a lot of energy into organizing an event, only to find out your star speaker doesn't support our reform!

Keep in mind that if you want to invite a speaker from far away you may need to schedule the event several months ahead, perhaps even for the next semester.

DM SPEAKER'S BUREAU! The staff at Democracy Matters are available to speak at your school or may have ideas of others in your area. Call us at 315-725-4211 and check out the Speaker's Bureau on the DM website.

<http://www.democracymatters.org/organizing-tools/speakers-bureau/>

3) RALLY

If you have a lot of supporters, you can work with your coalition partners to hold a rally for Fair Elections. Do this only if you can be sure it will be big (50-100 people) or if you have a catchy visual aid or production (impromptu theater, art installations, flash mob, etc) that will make your event press-worthy.

4) OTHER CAMPAIGNS - GET CREATIVE!

- a. **Student or Professor Debate** - Have a panel discussion using professors who care about issues like the environment, poverty, the cost of higher education etc. and link each of these issues to money in politics - Ask your Staff Link for ideas on this! Orstage a debate between faculty who support campaign finance reform and those who don't! You can also work with a political science club to put on a student debate.
- b. **Money and Politics Trivia** - Hold a trivia contest on the impacts of money in politics and the different things we can do to address the problem. This is a fun way to educate people and engage them enough to get involved. Make sure you arrange for food and prizes.
- c. **Slam for Democracy** - Do a poetry slam on the topic of money in politics. How does this issue affect so many other things people care about from affordable education to international peace to the environment? You'll be surprised by the beautiful passion that comes from students expressing how much they care about being heard in our government.
- d. **Run for Democracy! (or other money in politics improv theater on campus)** - Hold a race around campus during a busy time of day between a "candidate" who has the benefit of rich corporate donors and one who doesn't. Get creative. Dress up in zany costumes. Have volunteers play the role of rich donors betting on the candidates with play money, while others play the role of constituents trying to get a candidate to listen to them about

an issue. Make sure to use large signs to indicate who is playing what role.

One rule could be that for every sidewalk square around the quad they run, they have to raise a certain amount of money to move forward. Super PAC characters can throw up posters of negative and misleading “ads” to block the candidate’s way. Or every time a donor calls, they have to stop running and take the call. Maybe one candidate loses too much time talking to constituents instead of raising money. A party at the end for the “winner” can offer free food and a discussion of how students can get involved. Make sure to have lots of handouts to explain what you are doing. Invite people to attend the “party” or otherwise get involved, and have a couple of petitions and sign-up sheets on hand.

- e. **Money and Politics Song Contest or Benefit Concert** - Invite people to make up or repurpose an existing song to highlight how ridiculous it is that corporations and the wealthy are buying our elections. Or throw a fundraising/awareness raising concert with popular local or student bands. Show the Lessig TED talk and do a short talk about the campaign before the show. Ask the bands or performers to mention why they care about this issue when they are onstage.

Whatever creative event you do (see [Action Campaigns](#) for more ideas!), make sure you videotape it and share it with us. Email your video to anitak@democracymatters.org We want to share your ideas and materials with others.

You’ll find *more tools* for how to organize your event at [Organizing a SMART Campaign](#), [Using the Media](#), and tons of example/editable [Flyers](#). See also [Action Campaigns/Event Ideas](#)

E. REACH OUT TO OTHER GROUPS ON CAMPUS

Partnering with other student organizations is crucial to having great campaigns and events!

Before you approach an organization, think about how money in politics impacts them specifically, then frame the discussion with that in mind. For instance, environmental groups should care because oil and gas industry spends millions on campaign contributions to fight environmental reform. Those big energy donors want to handcuff the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), extend the Keystone Pipeline, and allow fracking to pollute local water supplies.

For info on how money in politics impacts different policies and issues, visit:

<http://www.democracymatters.org/what-you-need-to-know-about-money-in-politics-2/issue-impacts/>

Environment: <http://www.acrreform.org/research/money-in-politics-and-the-environment/>

Corruption hurts STUDENTS: <http://www.publiccampaign.org/reports/influence101>

Private prison industry corrupting democracy: <http://publiccampaign.org/reports/unholyalliance>

Women’s, Civil, Minorities, and the Poor: <http://www.publiccampaign.org/countryclub>
<http://regender.org/MoneyPoliticsGenderLens>

Ask the organization’s leaders how involved they would like to be. Would they be interested in co-hosting an event with you? Would they like to become a member or have a leadership role? Or including their name on press statements?

Here are several kinds of organizations that might be interested:

Political and Activist Organizations

Find other groups working on university, local, state, or national issues. Corruption in government impacts every level of government.

Student of Color Organizations

African-Americans and Latinos, (as well as students and older people) are being targeted with voter suppression tactics in many states. Corporate executives like the Koch brothers, who are funding voter ID and suppression efforts nationwide (see American Legislative Exchange Council a/k/a ALEC), are also using unlimited election funding to drown out the voices of low-income people and people of color.

Graduate Student Groups

If you are at a university, you may want to seek the support of both undergraduate and graduate student representatives. Business school groups focused on social enterprise, entrepreneurship, and small business may be interested in your campaign. You may also want to reach out to law school students and other graduate student groups to help you reach more undergraduate members.

Dorms/Residence Halls/Fraternities/Sororities

Speak at dorm meetings or host a movie event in one of the dorm's lounges. Flyering around dorms and doing dorm storms are a great way to find freshman and sophomores who are not affiliated with any group.

Newspaper/Radio/other Campus Media

Newspapers can cover your events as news and editorialize about the issues, as well as the importance of getting involved in your campaign. If you know someone who writes for the paper, ask to meet with them over coffee and fill them in on what you are doing. If not, call the paper and ask for an assignment editor, then explain the event.

You may also be able to make a formal presentation to the editorial board and ask them to write in favor of your issue (Fair Elections and how it impacts students and the United States). Make sure you are well prepared for these meetings. Never speculate on answers, just get back to them promptly with the answers to any questions you might not know. Other media outlets to approach include radio stations, television stations, and blogs. Some media outlets may be willing to co-sponsor an event; for example, a radio station can co-sponsor an awareness concert and broadcast it live.

****Faculty and Staff** (SO IMPORTANT!)**

On many campuses, faculty members are an untapped resource with lots of potential. These faculty are connected in ways you can't imagine and know where to look to find support. Professors can publicize your efforts in their classes, and hold lectures on the problem of unlimited corporate spending in elections or bring speakers who can. They can give extra credit for attendance at your events.

Contact individual faculty and staff members and ask their help (sociology, political science etc)