



Chapter Handbook

FORMING YOUR CHAPTER

STEP 1: Inform NYRA of your intent to form a chapter in your area. Please be specific about what area your chapter intends to cover. A NYRA Staff Member will contact you and will help you through every step of the process. You are encouraged to remain in close contact with the staff member assigned to you.

STEP 2: Find and recruit other people in your area to help set up the first meeting and the chapter. Your NYRA Staff Member will give any NYRA members in your area your contact information and encourage them to contact you. In the interests of privacy we cannot at this stage give out members' personal information if they do not agree. Also consider e-mailing the NYRA Discussion list to find area members. Consider conducting a youth rights survey at school to generate interest too. Instructions and sample here: <http://www.youthrights.org/forums/downloads.php?do=file&id=370>

STEP 3: Plan and hold the chapter's introductory meeting. Think about meeting at a classroom in your school, a local library, a café/restaurant, etc. Talk to your friends or people you think might be interested. In addition to directly contacting people you know, post meeting notices on bulletin boards at businesses, schools, youth centers, libraries, malls, and any other public places where you are allowed to post such notices.

At the first meeting, you should:

- Get to know your fellow NYRA members;
- Adopt all NYRA policy papers and the NYRA chapter by-laws (enclosed is a *sample* set of by laws);
- Obtain a written commitment of at least 5 people to become charter members of the chapter;
- Elect officers;
- Raise money for Charter fee;
- Fill out the NYRA Chapter Application Form;
- Schedule the next meeting;
- Plan out activities for your chapter to work on;
- Discuss youth rights ideas.

STEP 4: Send in NYRA Chapter Application Form and send the one-time 30-dollar fee to obtain an official NYRA Charter.

Applications should be sent to:
National Youth Rights Association
1101 15th St., NW
Suite 200
Washington, DC 20005

We will notify you when you have been approved as an official chapter.

Should you have any questions throughout this process, please feel free to contact either the NYRA Staff member who has been assigned to your chapter, or the national office at nyra@youthrights.org (202) 296-2992 ext.131.

CHAPTER ACTIVITIES

There's a lot you can do as an NYRA chapter. What you choose to do will depend on the size and dedication of your chapter and the particular circumstances of young people in your community. The following are some suggestions. (See "WHAT IS YOUTH RIGHTS?" below for information on what laws or rules you can take on.)

1. Meet with public officials in person - Many state legislatures and just about every city council allow ordinary citizens like you to speak out at hearings on legislation. Speaking on behalf of or in opposition to a bill can convince an ambivalent legislator to vote your way. Also, try to arrange one-on-one meetings with officials to talk about both youth rights in general and specific pieces of legislation that they may be considering.



NYRA Orange County Members Natasha & Alex Hull-Richter meeting with California Treasurer and Governor candidate, Phil Angelides

2. Petition campaigns - Go out into your school and community to get as many people as possible to sign petitions against a specific age restriction and submit the petition to the appropriate agency or organization. Petitions get a lot of notice, especially if you can get a lot of signatures. Elected officials realize that a group of people that cares enough about an issue to write a petition are generally people who care enough to think about the issue when they vote

3. Letter-writing campaigns - Have chapter members and friends send letters to public officials. You can either write to them about specific pieces of legislation or just let them know what you think about youth rights in general. In most states and some local governments, you can find what legislation has been introduced on the Internet or in newspapers. It's best to have members write to those who represent their own district, so match up your chapter's members with their legislative districts.

4. Contact local media - When you participate in or launch a campaign, it's usually a good idea to try to get coverage of it in newspapers and on radio and television. You can send them a press release. If you don't know how to write a press release, the NYRA staff can help out. All new chapters will have an introductory press release sent to local media. Also, send letters to the editor about youth rights issues. Do not limit your publicity to "progressive" publications or those you think agree with your chapter; while they can be a good start the idea is to gain mainstream attention and support. Local newspapers generally are easier to get a notice in than large regional papers. Still, if one of your members is good at writing, give it a shot. A well written, poignant piece can really impress an editor, especially if it's something most people wouldn't bother to write about.

5. Arrange youth rights meetings - Arrange regularly scheduled events for members to get to know each other and discuss age discrimination with like-minded individuals. Having anywhere from weekly to monthly meetings is encouraged to keep your chapter going. Building strong relationships between members is important to keeping chapters functional. Meetings can be as formal or informal as you like, the important thing is finding a setup that works for your chapter.

6. Protest! - Organize protests. For example, if your city council is considering an anti-youth law, protest just outside city hall! Or arrange a protest in your state capital. Protests are most effective when they're

relevant to recent news or events or are part of a larger campaign. Remember to let local media know about the protests, but never overestimate the number of people you think are going to show up. It's best to underestimate and then surprise whatever reporters may be present by having more supporters than they were anticipating.

7. Create a web page- Design a web page for your local chapter; after you design it, we can link the page from the NYRA site, we have a section on the page for our chapters. All NYRA chapters are provided with a subdomain (i.e. <http://yourchapter.youthrights.org>) for your chapter website. NYRA web volunteers are able to assist you with setting up and designing your website.

And More- There's even more you can do. Be creative! Come up with innovative solutions to the problem of age restrictions! The best ideas are generally tailored to the area where your chapter is.

PROMOTION

Now that you have your chapter set up and approved, your next step is to promote the organization and build a membership base.

One way of promoting your chapter is through distribution of flyers and posters. Post flyers and posters at businesses, schools, youth centers, libraries, malls, and any other public places. Don't post a flyer somewhere without the permission of whoever is in charge of that place. You can make your own or download flyers here: <http://www.youthrights.org/flyers>

Setting up literature tables at local events, or hand out flyers at concerts and places with large gatherings of people is an excellent way to spread awareness.



NYRA member Chris Lydon at Warped Tour in New Jersey

Don't forget word-of-mouth. Just talking about NYRA can go a long way towards spreading awareness. Encourage the members of your chapter to promote it and the organization, and make sure to do so yourself!

A good way to gain publicity around your school is to pass out small "surveys." Have the surveys

ask questions about the issues your chapter has decided to focus on, or on general NYRA issues like the voting age and drinking age. At the end of the survey, let them know that if they want to get involved with these issues to contact your chapter so they can sign up

Running an organization can be expensive. Feel free to raise money for your chapter. You can throw a fund-raising event like a concert or ask for donations when you sign people up. No matter how modest a chapter's goals, there will come a time where you'll need some money. Different chapters handle this different ways, some have membership dues, others do fundraising activities, still others look for donations and grants that are available to organizations like NYRA. How you approach this is totally up to you, but the "Fundraising" section, below, will give you a few ideas on how to raise money.

Finally, always keep chapter members informed. Send out mailings informing them of events, such as membership meetings - you may want to combine everything into a periodical newsletter to save space. And don't be afraid to use the telephone to keep in touch with your members.

Marketing your chapter isn't all that difficult and can actually be fun if you do it in a group. The trick is getting the message to people in a way that isn't confrontational, no matter how nasty they might be. Remember, we're trying to show people how motivated, responsible youth are every bit as worthy of rights as adults, the best way to do that is to act in a way that makes you seem every bit deserving of respect and fair treatment as they are. The key is being informed, firm, but at the same time respectful.

FUNDRAISING

There are several ways to go about fundraising, and a few ways to make it so you need less money. We'll start with fundraising, since having money to hold events is not only useful, but can make events more fun and help raise awareness and resources for your chapter at the same time.

1.) Holding events is a good way to raise a couple of hundred dollars at a time and have a good deal of fun while doing it. Remember, doing things in a group can make the difference between it feeling like work or making it an activity you can enjoy that incidentally makes you money. There's a lot of good ideas out on the internet and in many other youth organizing books about the types of events you can hold, a few of the more interesting ones NYRA has come across or tried include:

a. Making Buttons. Buttons can be cheap to make, and easy and fun to sell. Exercise your creative spirit to come up with cool designs for the buttons. You can use chapter meetings to make them. Selling buttons can be a good small scale source of revenue.



NYRA members making buttons during a campaign in Vermont to get the drinking age lowered.

b. Having a poker night. This is easier in college than in high school, but there's no reason to not have a poker night with donated prizes in your school so long as you clear it with your administrator. Charge a relatively small entry fee, find a local business or two that is willing to donate prizes (you'd be amazed how many places

would be willing to if you ask the right way) and advertise heavily, getting the word out is always the most important thing when it comes to fundraising events

c. Garage Sale. Sounds old and not very profitable right? Depends on how you do it. Hold a garage sale right before college students come back to school and you'd be surprised at the kind of money you can make off things like old tables, couches or even things like lamps you no longer need or anything in between. If every member brings a few things they don't want you can get quite a spread up. This isn't always the most effective option and naturally cannot be done everywhere.

d. Partnering With a Local Restaurant for a Day. A rather novel idea, approach a local restaurant and talk to them about getting a percentage of sales from everyone who says they come to the restaurant because of your advertising. Restaurants will offer anywhere between 5 – 15% of what they make. Be sure you advertise this especially well, have members organize groups of friends to go, and be sure everyone in your chapter goes as well.



Who knew that killing aliens might actually be a profitable enterprise

e. Hold a Video Game Tournament. Now here's an idea that a lot of people really enjoy. Get a video game that everyone likes, as of 2008, you might try Halo 3, Guitar Hero, Super Smash Brothers or DDR.

Get a bunch of machines (Xbox360, Play Station 3, Wii) together with a few TVs. Get a few donated prizes, charge a modest admission and have at it. Throw a few of your chapter members into the competition as well if you want to enjoy the games along with everyone else. No reason you can't have fun too.

- f. Organize a Silent Auction. Contact local businesses and convince them to donate goods or services that you can auction off to participants at a fundraising dinner or party. They bid on the items and NYRA keeps the cash. A great guide has been written on silent auctions, check it out here: <http://www.youthrights.org/forums/downloads.php?do=file&id=362>
 - g. Find Other Ways to Raise Money in Your Community. While we provided a few suggestions, many of the best options are those tailored best to work within the community your chapter operates. While having a clam bake or such in New England makes sense (with a lot of organization and money) it would make less sense in the middle of Chicago. Look to see where money making opportunities are in your community and find ways to turn them to your advantage, remember, fundraising isn't the end goal of NYRA, advocacy is, so don't get carried away.
- 2.) Grants and Mini-Grants. Many organizations have grants and programs that give substantial amounts of money (anywhere from \$250 to \$20,000 and more) to groups of motivated youth looking to be activists. These grants are excellent places to turn to if your NYRA chapter finds itself in need of funds. One group in particular, Youth Venture, is famous for offering \$1000 grants to youth activist groups. All most grants require is a plan for how you'll spend the money and the proper filing of a few forms. A few of the better groups to get grants from:
- a. Youth Venture. As mentioned, Youth Venture offers a number of grants, including the \$1000 one that most chapters could qualify assuming the proper paperwork is filed. **All new chapters should apply for this grant.** We have worked with Youth Venture in the past, and they are familiar with our organization. Several of NYRA's chapters have received these grants in the past. This is, perhaps, the single best way to get started raising money. NYRA's staff will be more than happy to help walk you through the process should you have any questions. This grant is not a competitive grant, so most chapters should be able to receive money from Youth Venture. <http://www.genv.net/>
 - b. The Kellogg Institute. You hear Kellogg and I'm sure you think cereal, and you're right. But they also have a charitable foundation that gives out grants to groups doing a variety of things. A group with similar aims as NYRA got a grant from them to help lower the voting age in their town. A decent place to look for what might be available for your own priorities and projects.
<http://www.wkkf.org>
 - c. The Knight Foundation. A group that focuses mainly on journalism related objectives. Is your school paper heavily censored and students not granted free speech rights? Here's a group that might be interested in helping you out.
<http://www.knightfdn.org/default.asp?story=about/purpose.asp>
- 3.) Working Through Your School: Every school deals with forming clubs a different way. Some colleges have massive student activity budgets where they throw around hundreds of dollars so long as you propose a decent budget. Other colleges keep their groups on a shoestring budget, if that. High schools are also a mixed bag, sometimes they'll give their clubs money, and other times they just give them a place to meet. How you try to get funding from your school is very much dependent on what school it is you go to, however, some basic advice:
- a. Stress That NYRA is a Political Interest Group: Many, though admittedly not all, schools like having a diverse number of political advocacy groups, Young/College Democrat and

Republican chapters make a school look to be civically engaged and responsible. NYRA chapters are non-partisan naturally, but are every bit as legitimate a political organization as a Democrats or Republicans group. Make sure whoever is in charge of the clubs process understands this.

- b. Remember, NYRA is an Advocacy Group: A successful NYRA chapter doesn't just sit in a room sipping coffee and plotting for the day when youth are given equal rights as adults, though that can certainly be part of it, chapters are out advocating for change. A lot of schools will enjoy the publicity that comes from students being involved in a local political process. Mention how having activists participating in the community can help a school's prestige.
- c. Free Speech Can Get You Far: Advocacy groups generally are sheltered by free speech protection. This is not a guarantee your school will appreciate NYRA's message. Try to make administrators understand that a healthy liberal democracy (which the United States qualifies as) needs all sorts of different viewpoints to arrive at policies that help the maximum amount of people. Also, if your school is initially skeptical of your chapter, do things to show that you're activists, not anarchists; mass sit ins of the headmaster's/principal's/president's office probably shouldn't be your first activity on campus.

Remember, though NYRA isn't a business, there are lots of ways to make money and it's a lot easier to advocate with money than without. Give some thought to how it is you want to raise money, and, more importantly, for what, then think of the best way to do it. Not every idea will work in every area, so try a bunch. Also, remember, a lot of grants are from national organizations, don't expect to get every one you apply for. The national office has tried and failed, don't be upset or discouraged if you do too.

COORDINATION WITH NATIONAL POLICY

Both the chapter and the organization as a whole benefit from your affiliation with NYRA. You get the name recognition and resources of a national organization; NYRA gets the benefit of more members and geographic diversity. Every victory a chapter scores across the country will raise the prestige and give a good view of all the chapters associated with NYRA. In this way, you might get increased publicity for what people are doing miles away, and they'll get the same from what you do.

We require little of you. We are not bureaucrats in a distant office building; we're just a group of people trying to organize for youth rights in our own communities, like you. Since you know your community best, we want you to retain a good deal of autonomy. The whole point of the movement is to show that youth can be responsible and active leaders in their community; that starts with leading the movement.

However, for NYRA to work there must be consistency between all the local chapters and the national board. We cannot have someone using the NYRA name to act contrary to the strategies and policies established for the organization.

Individuals can join NYRA either through your chapter or directly through the national office. On a monthly basis you will be forwarded information on members who join at the NYRA web page. Likewise, when a member joins your chapter, you must submit their membership information to the NYRA national office. You can also encourage people to join through the Web site, www.youthrights.org.

For Full Membership NYRA requires \$10 yearly dues for all members nationwide. As a chapter, you may charge a fee for chapter membership too, so you are free to recruit

members at the \$10 minimum, or charge them a higher amount and keep the difference in the chapter account. You can also (and many do) use fundraising to pay for membership dues, something as simple as a bake sale, if marginally successful, can pay for the dues of several people.

Free membership is still available; all you need is some contact information. Only dues paying members can vote in NYRA elections and run for the NYRA Board though, but you can establish your own rules for chapter voting.

In accordance with the National Bylaws, a chapter will lose its charter in any of the following circumstances:

1. If any chapter officials use violence on behalf of the organization.
2. If any chapter fails to adequately address an officer embezzling funds or committing any other serious illegal activity in his or her role as a NYRA Chapter officer.
3. If any chapter is known to discriminate based on age, race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, income, or disability.
4. If any chapter engages in any activity or makes any public statements contrary to any position adopted by the NYRA Membership.

The national board needs you to update NYRA staff regularly on the plans and accomplishments of your chapter. After every meeting or event please send us, via e-mail (NYRA@youthrights.org), the minutes of the meeting. We want to publicize the work you've done and any success you might have, the more people who know, the more people who'll begin to see that NYRA can be a powerful force for change.

Also, any campaigns you are working on or events you are holding that you'd like featured in NYRA's monthly newsletter, "NYRA Freedom", please send an e-mail to nyrafreedom@youthrights.org to let our newsletter staff know.

WHAT IS YOUTH RIGHTS?

It is important everyone is on the same page when speaking of "youth rights."

NYRA's mission statement states:

"The National Youth Rights Association is dedicated to defending the civil and human rights of young people in the United States. We believe certain basic rights are intrinsic parts of American citizenship and transcend age or status limits. As the world's leading democracy and archetype of a free society, the United States should not lag behind other nations in granting first-class citizenship to its young people.

"NYRA aims to achieve its goals through educating people about youth rights, working with public officials to devise fitting policy solutions to problems affecting young people and empowering young people to work on their own behalf."

NYRA's strategy is to promote "youth rights" in general and have an agenda of limited objectives we can work on at a given time. Remember, many will see even our mildest proposals as very radical; so it is in your interest, and ours, to endorse proposals that have a possibility of succeeding and won't alienate young people and the general populace.

NYRA has a two-tiered system for taking positions. Only the national board can pass "policy papers." These pretty much state what issues the organization can campaign on. Either the president or someone appointed by the president can take statements on specific questions or legislation. For example, a NYRA policy paper says the organization is opposed to juvenile curfew laws. Only the board can change that. But you can, for example, oppose a bill to increase the penalty for curfew violation in your town. Basically, NYRA says what policies we're opposed to *in general* and you can use those to find things in your community to fight *in particular*.

If you want to take on an issue that is not covered by a policy paper, don't hesitate to contact the national board, and we'll see what we can do. However, note that NYRA chapters may not take positions on anything having to do with abortion, sex or guns. These issues carry so much emotional baggage, taking a position one way or the other might turn off people who would otherwise support the organization.



Taking on controversial actions by school administrators provides lots of material to work with.

The easiest thing to do is to react to proposals already introduced by others in a legislature or city council. However, you probably will want to start a proactive campaign of your own to try to get a proposal of your own passed. The following is a list of issues you may want to work on, depending on the circumstances in your community and the size and dedication of your chapter. It's best to work on one or two issues at a time across the chapter rather than try to do everything at once.

Age discrimination in businesses: Federal law does not prohibit business owners from refusing to hire or serve young people, but many states have laws that prohibit them from doing so. Such laws do not supersede child labor laws or alcohol laws, but may otherwise protect you from discrimination. Authorities in New York City and Holland, Mich., have forced businesses to end policies that prohibited young people from shopping in their stores.

States that prohibit age discrimination in places of public accommodation (i.e. most businesses)

include: Delaware, Florida, Maryland, Michigan, Montana, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Oklahoma, and Virginia.

Since the law is already on our side on this issue in these states, this issue might be a good one for you to take up first. If there is a coffee shop, store or other establishment in your town that discriminates against youth by refusing to serve them or hire them, you might want to check if your state and/or local government prohibit that. If so, you should inform the business of the law and politely request that they abide by it. If they don't, you can file a complaint with whatever agency handles such cases under your state's law.

You can turn this into a citywide campaign by checking which businesses are not following the law and publicizing your actions against the ones that don't. Even in states without an anti-age discrimination law this is a very good issue to take on. Most Americans know of the race segregation that existed in the Jim Crow South, the current age segregation that exists all over the country is very similar. Learn from the tactics and successes of the Civil Rights Movement.

Youth have a lot more purchasing power than people really acknowledge, a lot of marketing is directed towards them, boycotting, especially visibly, a business that discriminates can have a very noticeable effect. However, it is generally more effective to try meeting with the storeowners before you begin a boycott.

Curfew laws: The primary strategy of curfew opponents up to now has been to challenge them in court. Some laws have been overturned, others upheld, but rarely have lawsuits convinced other cities to drop their laws. In the 1990's, youth rights activists in places like San Diego and Washington, D.C., launched nighttime protests against the law. Depending on the size and attitude of your town, it may require months of constant, large protests to make them reconsider a curfew law. If a town near you does not have a curfew, and someone proposes one, fight it as voraciously as you can. Remember, it's a thousand times easier to stop a proposal than to overturn a law. We have some information that can help you argue effectively against a curfew:

<http://www.youthrights.org/curfew.php>

Curfew laws are constantly billed as "anti-crime" measures, much of our literature deals with ways to show this to be a factual lie. Remember,

something like this is no different than racial profiling. Your movement is being restricted for no other reason than you weren't born at the proper time. People don't generally look at it this way, so it's the job of the campaign you organize to get people to see this. It's something that most people, when you challenge them properly, respectfully and above all, intelligently, generally can see pretty quickly. Most just don't think about it.

Case Study

In the fall of 2007, NYRA's President, Stefan Muller, waged a campaign against a local curfew law in Long Island, New York. Stefan had the support of his school and the local ACLU behind him and ultimately was successful in overturning the town's curfew law. Read about his victory here:

<http://blog.youthrights.org/2007/10/27/opposing-a-curfew-part-3/>

Drinking-age reform: Anyone who has traveled abroad knows the United States' drinking age is unique. Internationally, the United States is almost alone with a drinking age of 21. That fact and the widespread indignation over the drinking age make it an attractive target for youth rights activists. However, the federal law that withholds highway funds from states who don't have a drinking age of 21 has forced opponents to try unique solutions.

Some influential people have suggested a "license" that would allow some young people - perhaps those 18-20 - to drink under limited circumstances, such as no hard liquor or no carry-out. A couple of legislators in Colorado introduced such a bill there, but it has not passed, mainly because the bill would try to use funds from license purchases to make up for the money the feds would keep from the state, rather than work around the federal law.

In Washington State, some legislators are trying to reform the law there to allow more all-ages concerts.

Keep in mind that the National Minimum Legal Drinking Age Act only requires that states not allow the sale of alcohol to individuals under 21. States can, however, allow alcohol *consumption* under 21. Or states can decriminalize underage drinking or deprioritize drinking age enforcement. Passing laws like this are easy

ways to neutralize the drinking age without jeopardizing your state's federal highway funds.

You might want to talk to state legislators about the prospect of introducing such a bill. Even if you can't get it introduced, you should talk to local newspapers or otherwise raise publicity about the issue. If nothing else, talking to lawmakers will give you an idea about the challenges such proposals face and think of ways you can work with those legislators to get around them. Many lawmakers are actually very happy to talk to young people who have strong views on politics, use this to your advantage. We have a lot of information that can help you argue against the drinking age:

<http://www.youthrights.org/drinkingage.php>

Voting rights: In 1971 the national voting age was lowered from 21 to 18. Further lowering of the voting age is desired by many youth. Though a constitutional amendment will be out of our reach for many years there are many voting age issues your chapter can work for on a smaller scale. The 26th amendment requires states to set their voting age no *higher* than 18, but it does not prevent any state or city from lowering their voting age below 18.

Your chapter might want to attempt to get your city council to lower the age for city elections. Note, however, that in some states,

municipalities are required to obtain the consent of the state legislature in order to lower the voting age. Whether or not your state allows municipalities to lower their voting ages independent of the state is an important fact to research. Also integral to voting and representation is trying to get student votes and representatives on school boards and city councils. Education issues are some of the biggest facing youth today and having a voice on your local school board can make a world of difference in the quality of education in your town or where various funds are allocated.

While lowering the voting age on a state wide level is a significantly more difficult goal, with time and organization it might be possible to launch such a campaign if inroads are made at the local level in enough places. Many bills have been introduced in the past several years to lower the voting age, many of which have been started by NYRA chapters. Read the full list here:

<http://www.youthrights.org/votestatus.php>

We have considerable amounts of literature that show the benefits of a lower voting age, use these to your advantage, school administrators and local politicians are generally thrilled to see youth actively interested in the political process, our resources are a valuable tool you can use:

<http://www.youthrights.org/votingage.php>

ADVICE AND HELP WITH ADVOCACY

A lot of people will never have tried the things NYRA suggests to help change views in your area. Many students have never written an editorial or even a letter to the editor. Few have protested or had to make signs, flyer properly, or do the things that large demonstrations require. This is not a problem. We're here to help. Below is a general guide to the different tools of the activist.

Writing An Effective Letter to the Editor

There are a few main things to remember when writing to a newspaper, be it student or professionally run.

- 1.) **Be Concise:** Concise is a nice way to say keep it short and to the point. Letters to the editor are generally subject to very strict word limits, generally of 250 words, because editors get letters *every day* and need to fit as many as space allows. Don't exceed these limits, even by a bit. Good writing is generally very pithy and even the best-written letter will generally be edited for clarity and tone by the editor. Make sure that every sentence you write is furthering your point, don't waste time with a fanciful introduction to your point, no matter how well written, jump write into it. The first sentence should immediately reference what article or issue you're talking about and the next sentence should immediately explain your main problem with it. The rest of the letter should focus on why that objection is valid (i.e. Give evidence to support your view). Remember, don't unnecessarily ramble on and belabor a point, cut to the chase immediately. Also remember concise does not imply an incomplete thought, explain as much as you need to for the reader to understand your point, but don't go beyond that explanation. You have a limited space to make your argument, make it count.
- 2.) **Reference Something Recent:** Most letters to the editor refer to an article or event that has happened within the past few days. Don't comment on news from a week ago or longer. A lot of letters to the editor also are about the editorial positions of the paper (often found in the left side of the first page of the Editorial and Op-Ed Section) and these usually run the *day after* the editorial runs. If you see something in the paper you strongly disagree with, and it's in the editorial section, respond immediately. Don't give yourself a few days to mull it over or think about, debate happens lightning fast in media, you've got to keep up, or no one will notice.
- 3.) **Use Strong Language:** This doesn't mean curse. Even the most poorly edited and overseen college newspapers place very tight restrictions on profanity. Strong language means words that get a response from people. Instead of saying "this law is unfair" say something more like "This new law is a betrayal of my generation" one makes you sound like... well... a child, the other makes you seem impassioned and educated. Especially when it comes to advocating for youth, the better, more informed, more intelligent you make yourself and your chapter look, the better chance you have both of getting printed, and of convincing people.
- 4.) **Leave Contact Information:** Most papers want contact information from people who write letters, normally including name, e-mail address, phone number, street address and your position within the organization. It helps to have letters come from the president of the chapter, even if the president didn't write it. Otherwise have them come from the "Communications Director" or some similar title. Having the letter come from an officer gives it weight and makes it more likely that people will take notice, and that it'll get published.
- 5.) **Don't Be Discouraged If You Don't Get Published:** Remember, editors get a massive amount of writing on a daily basis; oftentimes they select only a few out of many possible submissions. Local papers are easier to be printed in than statewide papers and national papers are the toughest of all. Don't expect to write a letter to the New York Times and see it in print the next day. However, if you're persistent, a local paper will eventually give you column space, assuming you write well and make your point soundly. Again, persistence and practice is the key. Even most professional editorialists got shot down frequently before their first piece of writing was published.

WRITING AN EFFECTIVE OP-ED PIECE

Having an Op-Ed piece appear in a paper can be a major coup for your chapter. These pieces are longer, generally get more readers and show that the paper considers your point well made enough to devote serious column space to. Getting one printed will require a decent skill at writing and remembering what exactly it is that papers look for in writing. Keep the following in mind when you're writing.

- 1.) **Once Again, Be Concise:** Just because you've got more words to play around with than with a letter to the editor doesn't mean that any one of them should be wasted. Every word you put in your writing should be essential to the flow of your argument. Good writers make sure that there isn't any clutter, if you find a sentence that doesn't further support your argument, either rewrite it or remove it completely. An average word length for Op-Ed piece is anywhere from 500 – 600 words, which is about a type written page of size 12 font. This is a lot less space than you think.

- 2.) **Be Organized in Your Writing:** Some writers can sit down and write a paper without planning it out before hand. Most cannot. If you can, by all means, that's fantastic, if not though, you want to sit down and plan out what you're doing. This probably sounds familiar, that's because most schools drill the idea of outlining into kids at a young age. The best format for an editorial is something called the 5-paragraph essay, which generally ends up being about, you guessed it, 500 – 600 words if you do it right. Here's the structure:
 - a. *First Paragraph, Introduction:* Essentially, start with a broad thought, and narrow it and refine it through the course of the paragraph (about 5 –6 sentences total is fine) until you reach the last sentence in your paper which is generally the statement you'll be arguing throughout the Op-Ed. Make sure the last sentence is the strongest in the paragraph, indeed, the strongest in the piece, this is the one idea that you want to have stick in people's minds after they read your piece. This is commonly called the "thesis statement."
 - b. *Second – Fourth Paragraph, Support:* The next 2 – 3 (not all arguments need three paragraphs of support) should detail the reasons that the thesis statement is true. If your thesis statement is "The Drinking Age Should Be Lowered to 18" each paragraph thereafter should explain why. The second paragraph could start with "Studies show that drunk driving deaths overall have not been reduced" and then you could spend the rest of the paragraph explaining how and why. The first sentence of each supporting paragraph should be a mini-thesis statement of its own that explains what the paragraph will cover.
 - c. *Last Paragraph, Conclusion:* This is the most important paragraph of the paper, as it generally is where the argument is made for the last time and where the strongest language is used to push the point forward. Start by writing your thesis statement a second time, but in a new way, it should not be a copy of the last sentence of your first paragraph but it should make the same point. After that, have your piece branch out again, relate it to something interesting in society, or make some broad statement about how things stand. Basically, the last few sentences should say why what you just wrote is important and perhaps give the reader a reason to go "Ah, that's interesting." Writing a good conclusion will be the most difficult part of the editorial. Don't shortchange it. Take as much time as you need to make it sound perfect, remember, this is the last thing the reader will see, make sure it's something he'll want to remember.

- 3.) **Be Persuasive:** Op-Ed writing's purpose is to convince and persuade your audience that your point of view is the best one. This is not accomplished by being inflammatory. Even if the person or cause you're writing in opposition to is truly loathsome, you actually hurt your argument by attacking it with strong language. Calling a proposal or person "Idiotic" "Foolish" or "Stupid" is a good way to get people to stop listening. Instead, use words like "Needs Further Thought" or "Ineffective." There are

times when what you're talking about, a 10:00pm curfew law for instance, where it really is a horrible idea and you want to say so. Don't overdue it. You can call something "Horrible" "Highly Damaging" "Offensive" "Insulting" "Demeaning" but don't just go off on it and call it bad things, your main focus is making a point, in doing that, the fact that it's awful will become easily apparent to the reader. Do your job, and you won't need to call it an awful idea, people who read your writing will do it for you.

- 4.) **Don't Take Advantage of "Youth Focus" Sections Unless You Have No Other Choice:** While this may seem like an easy in, it puts you in a separate category, away from the "real" Op-Ed pieces. Yes, people read sections where youth writers submit work, but not in the same way they read a paper's regular Op-Ed section. Getting yourself published in the main section will be a far bigger statement than in a youth section. Still, this can be useful, especially if the focus is an issue your chapter has been working on.
- 5.) **Once Again, Leave Contact Information:** If this is true for Letters to the Editor, it is especially true for full-length Op-Ed pieces. Most papers have a list of what they want from someone submitting an Op-Ed piece, be sure you give it to them, otherwise you won't be printed.
- 6.) **Don't Get Discouraged:** This is understandably difficult; especially considering how much effort is involved in good writing. But you have to remember that most papers won't immediately print material written by younger writers. Once again, the trick is persistence. Keep writing, as you do it more, it will get easier and you'll get better at it. Submit to multiple papers in your area, if one doesn't print you, another might. Write on multiple issues. It takes work, but once you get it once, you'll have found what works and you can try it on another paper, or write for the same one on something else. Who knows, prove yourself to be a voice on a certain issue and that paper might interview you for actual news articles.



HOW TO GET ELECTED LEADERS TO LISTEN

Most people assume that elected officials couldn't care less about what youth have to say on any number of issues. Laws and ordinances in many cities and states would seem to bear this logic out. In fact, it's largely because adults dominate the discussion of political issues because most youth don't care enough to get involved. If you get involved, political leaders and policy makers usually *enjoy* talking to youth. There are a few tips to getting elected officials not only to talk to you, but also take what you say seriously, among them:

- 1.) **Make an Appointment:** This should be common sense, but to some it isn't. Politicians of all kinds are very busy individuals, call their office and ask when they'd be available to meet with a constituent. If you make an appointment, make sure you show up.
- 2.) **Look Presentable:** Politics is one of the few businesses where a suit is seen as every day attire. Don't under dress for a meeting with a politician otherwise they'll think you're not taking this seriously. While you may have a favorite torn T-shirt with a band or some creative profanity on it, dress nicely and professionally.
- 3.) **Ask Questions:** Don't just go there making demands and saying what you'd like to see happen. Ask him how you can make what you want a reality. Show interest in how your plans can be made concrete and feasible. Politicians will either tell you, or point you towards the person who can. Remember, meeting with staff members, especially for more important public figures, is very common, these people are more powerful than most people give them credit for. In politics, it is generally the staffers who write laws, propose ideas, advise the elected official, and do the nuts and bolts of making laws. Get to know them, make a good impression; what they think of you can determine how far they take your suggestions and concerns.



Making a good impression means leaving things like your favorite Bob Marley shirt in the closet for the day.

- 4.) **Stress What You've Done Already, and What You Hope to Do in the Future:** A politician will be far more likely to give your argument or ideas thought if they've seen you've already done a lot of work in your community. The more results you can show, the better you can demonstrate that you get results, the more the politician will want to help you. Showing concrete plans for the future can also give the politician reason to help, and maybe offer some advice on what will work and what won't, convincing people is what politicians are best at, so if they offer

advice, it'll probably be pretty good.

- 5.) **Be persistent:** You may need to follow up with your elected official several times. They are busy people, and things can often fall through the cracks. If they promise to do something for you, and don't, get back in touch with them and ask what progress has been made.

WRITING LETTERS AND MAKING PHONE CALLS TO ELECTED OFFICIALS

There are plenty of times where a face-to-face meeting with an elected official is neither appropriate nor desirable. This is particularly true with higher-level officials, particularly U.S. Senators and Congressmen. There are also cases where it won't make nearly as much an impact as a good letter writing campaign or petition drive. Sometimes organizing a massive phone call drive can work even better. Most politicians have staff that do nothing but respond to constituent mail and phone calls. They consider these very important to getting reelected, get enough people to send mail or call, or get a petition with enough signatures and you'll get noticed. A few tips on letters and phone calls:

- 1.) **Writing Letters:** Letters to politicians should be written as business letters, not personal letters. See the box for how to address the letter. A business letter is far more formal and requires a different tone. Look at a piece of mail sent by a business for an example of the proper format. When actually writing the letter itself, be sure to say who you are, and where you're from. Then immediately say what issue/bill you're interested in. Then launch into your argument. Keep it respectful but don't be afraid to be forceful. Use as much evidence and objective support as you possibly can muster. Remember, you are attempting to persuade the politician to support or oppose something, so be persuasive. Also, remember your audience, don't be too informal. As always, be concise.

Some more tips:

http://itfs.org/webnow/licensees/writing_a_letter_to_congress.htm

<http://usgovinfo.about.com/library/weekly/aa020199.htm>

To a Senator:

The Honorable (Full Name)
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator:

To a Representative:

The Honorable (Full Name)
United States House of
Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative:

- 2.) **Making Phone Calls:** Political phone calls are actually pretty painless. Don't expect to reach the politician you're calling, you'll likely get an aid or an intern. This doesn't matter, elected officials keep extensive records about what people called their office and why. If enough people call about an issue, this will gain the notice of the politician. Keep it short; explain exactly what it is you're concerned about and what you hope the politician will do. Phone calls are most effective when an issue or bill is currently being considered by whatever legislative body the politician is part of. If a bill is currently before the legislature, see if you can find out the bill number and reference it when you call. Make sure you are clear which side of the issue you stand on. This form of communication shouldn't be used to meet/chat with the politician over issues.

ADVERTISING FOR EVENTS

The easiest way to get people to know about events on your campus is putting up flyers. This sounds really simple, but unless you've advertised for a club or group before, you might make a few missteps. Hopefully this section can keep that from happening. Here are a few things to remember when advertising for an event.

- 1.) **Make the Flyers Interesting:** Unless you're on an especially boring campus, you'll likely be competing for attention with several other flyers. Find some way to stand out. Each campus is different, but there's always ways to catch people's eye. If your chapter is having a poker night, put "Win an iPod" or something similar in the flyer for the event. (Assuming an iPod is one of the prizes, don't advertise something you can't deliver obviously.) Color is good, but difficult because color printers are more expensive however colored paper may be an available alternative. Bold letters, strange fonts, anything to draw the eye. You can also try putting the flyers in odd places most people wouldn't put them, on the ground walking to class is sometimes good as people with heavy backpacks are looking at the ground more than they're looking straight ahead, that won't work every where though. Depending on the environment of your school you could do something like "SEX!" in really bold letters and then below it, in smaller font, put something like "Now that I've got your attention, come to _____." Again, some schools (colleges mainly) allow that sort of advertising, others would strictly forbid it. Work within the system.
- 2.) **Make the Flyers Informative:** On every flyer there should be very clear directions about how the event can be reached and when it will be occurring. It's no good for people to think an event is cool if they have no clue how to get there. Make it so that the information on time and place is one of the *clearest* things there.
- 3.) **Use Your Area to Your Advantage:** If you have a student run newspaper, try to see if they'll do a story about the event you're putting on. Asking newspapers to do a story about your event is cheaper than taking out an ad in the newspaper. If your school has morning announcements over the PA, try to get it announced that way. Use the normal methods of information to your advantage. Almost all colleges, and some high schools, have a school e-mail system, get it put in the regular announcements of things going on around campus.



A NYRA member from Passaic, NJ helping to raise awareness in the community about Youth Rights

- 4.) **Word of Mouth:** You have friends; your friends have friends, hopefully lots of friends. Get them all talking about it. Tell everyone you know and make it sound exciting. Get enough people talking and looking at flyers and seeing things in normal means of communication in the area and people will come.

Half the battle with organizing fun events is making sure they are well known and well attended. A lot of times events serve to bring publicity to the chapter and the cause the chapter is supporting, other times, it's just to have some fun. Running a poker night in your school to raise money could just be a fun thing that incidentally gives your chapter money. Or you could hold a protest for the express purpose of getting publicity. Either way, advertise as much as you possibly can.

HOLDING A PROTEST

A lot of people have never been to a formal protest. It can be a lot of fun or it can be complete and utter anarchy. Such is the way of large groups of people coming together. Protests can be as simple as picketing or marching or as complex as getting speakers and bands to come to campus for an issue. There are some things you'll always need to keep in mind when organizing and holding a protest.

First, before considering a protest, make sure more traditional methods have been attempted first. There is nothing worse than organizing a big, angry protest outside the office of a school official when you never attempted to just sit down and talk to them first.

A protest seeks to do two things. Raise Awareness about an issue and Bring About Change on the issue you're protesting. To do this you need to carefully decide what you'll be doing for your protest and target it to make sure it has an effect on the intended audience. If you're simply seeking to raise awareness about an issue, than do something eye-catching and note-worthy. If you're trying to bring about change, figure out what sort of lever you can use to move the target of the protest, a concert isn't likely to change the school administrator's stance on the dress code, but something else might. Remember, to make people listen to your calls for change, you've got to do something that affects them, and at the same time doesn't alienate or offend them in such a way that they become more hostile.

- 1.) **Pick an Issue:** Nothing is worse than organizing a protest, doing all sorts of work to make sure you have a place to go and signs and t-shirts and everything else, and then everyone being on a different page on what you're there for. Pick an issue you want to deal with, and focus the attention and the energy on that. If you want to lower the drinking age, don't bring a bunch of anti-curfew pins with you as well. Keep things always focused on the cause you're protesting for or against, don't get distracted.
- 2.) **Pick a Protest Method:** There's lots of different ways you can protest things you think are unfair. It could be something like a protest march or something like a sit-in at

an age-segregated business or the office of a school administrator. Regardless of what you want to do, keep a few things in mind:

- a. **Be Vocal:** Make sure everyone knows what you're protesting and why. This comes down to advertising, and refining the message. Ever see old videos of protestors during Vietnam or during a union strike or something similar? You always knew what they wanted ("Peace Now" or "What Do We Want? Pensions! When Do We Want Them? NOW!") This is not to say that you should be unoriginal with what you chant or put on signs, but make sure that whatever you say, and whatever you make, says exactly who you are and what you want.
- b. **Pick a Location:** If your protest is big, you'll need to go to the town to get a permit. Public places require protests to register and get approval from the town. This is not difficult. If you're protesting on private property, you'll need to get the permission of that person or organization. If you're doing something like a sit-in, you don't really need to get permission, but you do need to keep in mind that who ever owns the office or area you're sitting in might take exception to your presence there and have you removed.
- c. **Advertise:** This is absolutely vital. Flyer, get your school or local paper in on it. Put up signs anywhere and everywhere. You want as many people as possible to know about the protest, and hopefully come, or at least see it, as possible.
- d. **Let the Games Begin:** Now that you've laid the groundwork, go out there and execute. If you've planned and advertised properly, things should go off relatively well. If it doesn't, don't be discouraged, most protests do not get the participation or attention that they hope for in the beginning. A lot of it comes with making connections and getting your name out there as a group that does this properly. Give it time. Practice makes these things easier, unsurprisingly.

NYRA CHAPTER APPLICATION FORM

Choose any name format you wish for your chapter as long as it has "NYRA" somewhere.
ex: NYRA-Forest Hills, NYRA-Nassau County

Name of Chapter _____

President's Mailing address _____

President's Phone Number _____

President's E-mail Address _____

Membership List

1. Print or type the name of each charter member, their mailing address and e-mail;
2. Keep one copy for your files, and send the original form to the NYRA national office.
3. Remember all future chapter members must also be submitted to the national office.
4. Be sure to indicate the titles of all chapter officers (treasurer, secretary, vice-president)

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

8. _____

9. _____

10. _____

NYRA CHAPTER BY-LAWS

- I. NAME: The Name of this chapter shall be _____ (chapter names must include the phrase “National Youth Rights Association”)
- II. The purpose of _____ is to promote the elimination and reform of laws that limit the freedom of young people in the United States by coordinating non-violent protest activities and communication nationwide.
- III. Membership
 - a. New members can join the organization by filling out the membership form, either the physical form or the electronic form at the NYRA website.
 - b. All NYRA chapter members must join the national NYRA as well. The chapter president is required to submit chapter membership forms to the national office.
 - c. Membership is open to anyone, regardless of age, race, sex, handicap, sexual orientation, religion or creed.
- IV. Chapter Officers
 - a. Elections
 - i. In future years, the chapter will elect officers at an annual meeting of members, the date to be set by the current President of the chapter.
 - ii. All chapter members are eligible to vote. Voters may vote for one candidate for each position only. Voters will have no less than one month and no more than two months to cast their vote.
 - iii. A candidate that receives a plurality of votes and at least 40% of the total votes wins his election.
 - iv. If no candidate wins 40% of the vote, or if there is a tie, there is to be a runoff election between the top two candidates (or all those tied for first place). The runoff election will also be held at the same annual meeting of members.
 - v. If at least five percent of chapter members request so, a vote on the removal of an officer is to be held. Seventy percent of chapter voters must vote to remove the person from office.
 - vi. Officers will receive no pay save reimbursement for personal expenses for the chapter if such money is available.
 - b. The president
 - i. The president will have the responsibility of the day-to-day management of the chapter.
 - ii. The president may appoint others to handle chapter business.
 - c. The vice president
 - i. The vice president will assume responsibilities of the president in case of the president’s resignation or removal from office for the remainder of the term.
 - ii. The president may also assign tasks to the vice president.
 - d. The treasurer
 - i. Chapter treasurers should be elected to handle financing, fund-raising, and money management for the chapter.
 - e. The secretary
 - i. The secretary will take minutes at meetings, write meeting agenda, and be responsible for chapter record keeping.
- V. This document
 - a. To come into effect, this document must be ratified by a 2/3rd vote held at the first meeting of the chapter.
 - b. This document may be amended following ratification by a 2/3rd vote held at any annual meeting of the chapter.