



# 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 can 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. Consider conducting a youth rights survey at school to generate interest too. Instructions and sample here: <http://www.youthrights.org/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2011/08/Youth-Rights-Survey.pdf>

**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 your completed NYRA Chapter Application Form (found at back of this handbook) and send the one-time 30-dollar fee to obtain an official NYRA Charter.

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

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

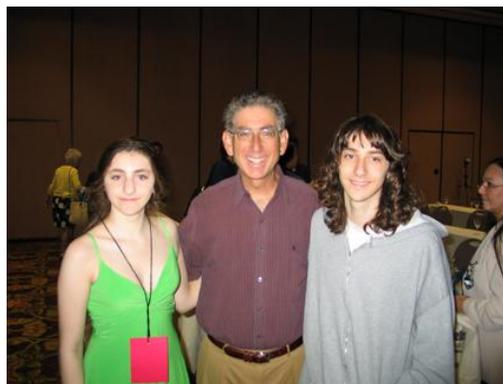
Should you have any questions throughout this process, please feel free to contact either the NYRA Staff member who has been assigned to your chapter, or the national office at [nyra@youthrights.org](mailto:nyra@youthrights.org) (202) 835-1719.

## 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 (even young citizens) 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 youth rights in general and also specific pieces of legislation 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 attention, 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. This also gives you a chance to collect contact information of people who agree with you on at least that one issue; you can recruit them for future actions.

### **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 news release. If you don't know how to write a release, you can find instructions online. Also, send letters to the editor about youth rights issues. Do not limit your publicity to publications you think agree with your chapter; while they can be a good start, you also want mainstream attention and support. Local newspapers generally are easier to get a notice in than large regional papers. A well-written, poignant piece can really impress an editor and inspire news coverage.

### **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 weekly or even monthly meetings is valuable. Building strong relationships between members keeps chapters functioning and thriving. Meetings can be as formal or informal as you please. Do what works for your chapter.

### **6. Protest! -** Organize demonstrations. If your city council is considering an anti-youth law, protest outside city hall. If your state legislature is considering a bill related to youth rights, arrange a protest at your state capital. Protests are most effective when they're relevant to recent news 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. A website can be useful for recruiting new members who find your site, for keeping your membership informed, and for allowing media, politicians, and others to see your past successes so they know to take you seriously.

**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

Once 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 handing out flyers at concerts and other large gatherings 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 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 they should 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 in different ways, some have membership dues, others do fundraising activities, still others look for donations and grants that are available to organizations like NYRA. The "Fundraising" section below will give you a few more ideas on how to raise money.

Finally, always keep chapter members informed. Send out e-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 and promoting the cause can be fun if you do it in a group. The trick is getting the message to people in a way that isn't overly-confrontational, no matter how nasty opponents might be. It's important that people see motivated, responsible youth every bit as worthy of rights as adults. The key is being informed and finding the most respectful ways to stand your ground.

## FUNDRAISING

There are several ways to fundraise, and a few ways to lessen your need for money. We'll start with fundraising strategies.

1.) Holding events is a good way to raise a few 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 it being an enjoyable activity. The internet and many youth organizing books offer plenty of suggestions for events you can hold; a few of the more interesting ones NYRA has encountered:

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 revenue source.



*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 small entry fee, find a local business or two willing to donate prizes (you'd be amazed how many places would be willing 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. Sound old and not very profitable? Depends how you do it. Hold a garage sale right before college students come back to school and you'll 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. If every member brings a few things they don't want, you can get quite an offering.
- d. Partnering With a Local Restaurant for a Day. 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: 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 an admission fee, and have at it. Throw a few of your chapter members into the competition as well if you want to enjoy the games. No reason you can't join the fun.
  - 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 guide to silent auctions is available here: <http://www.youthrights.org/research/downloads/?did=81>
  - g. Find Other Ways to Raise Money in Your Community. Many of the best options are those tailored to work within your chapter's community. 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. Find the money-making opportunities in your community and turn them to your advantage.
- 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 young activists. These grants are excellent places to turn if your NYRA chapter needs of funds. Youth Venture is famous for offering \$1000 grants to youth activist groups. Most grants require little more than a plan for how you'll spend the money and the proper filing of a few forms. Some groups to seek out:
- a. Youth Venture. They offer a number of grants, including the \$1000 one for which most NYRA chapters could 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 grants from them in the past. 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. DoSomething.org. They specialize in giving grants to youth-led projects, and they are especially interested in projects that give youth more of a voice in how the government is run.

<http://www.dosomething.org/>

- c. The Kellogg Institute. Kellogg, the cereal company, has a charitable foundation that gives out grants. One group got a Kellogg grant to help lower the voting age in their town. See what they have to offer your chapter.

<http://www.wkkf.org>

- d. The Knight Foundation. A group that focuses mainly on journalism-related objectives. Is your school paper censored and students not granted free speech rights? The Knight Foundation might be interested in helping you.

<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 offering hundreds of dollars so long as you propose a decent budget. Other colleges keep their groups on a shoestring. High schools are also a mixed bag, sometimes they'll give their clubs money, and other times they give them nothing more than a place to meet. How you get funding from your school depends on the school you go to.

Stress that NYRA is a political interest group: Many, though not all, schools like having a diversity of political advocacy groups. Young Democrat and Republican chapters make a school look to be civically engaged and responsible. NYRA is non-partisan but is every bit as legitimate a political organization as a Democratic or Republican group. Make sure whoever is in charge of the clubs process understands this.

There are many ways to raise money, and it's easier to advocate with resources than without. Not every idea will work in every area, so try several. Many grants are competitive, so don't get discouraged if you get turned down. Just keep working on the next one.

## 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 NYRA chapters. 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 don't micro-manage our chapters. Since you know your community best, we want you to retain a good deal of autonomy.

For NYRA to work, however, there must be consistency throughout the organization. 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. 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](http://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, however, can vote in NYRA elections and run for the NYRA Board, 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](mailto: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](mailto:nyrafreedom@youthrights.org) to let our newsletter staff know.

# WHAT IS YOUTH RIGHTS?

NYRA's mission statement:

*"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 radical; so it is in your interest, and ours, to endorse proposals that have a possibility of succeeding in the near future 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 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. 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, age of sexual consent, 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 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 this discrimination. 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. Among other places 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 in these states, this issue might be a good one for your chapter 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 in your state. (To find the appropriate agency, use the internet, ask at your library, or call your state legislator's office.)

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 can be a good issue to take on. In many ways, the current age segregation that exists all over the country is similar to the race segregation that existed in the Jim Crow South. The tactics and strategies of the Civil Rights Movement can bring us the same level of success.

Youth have a more purchasing power than some realize, so boycotting a business that discriminates can have impact. It is more

effective to try meeting with the storeowners before you begin a boycott. In any campaign, you should start with the mildest, friendliest approach first, then escalate to more confrontational tactics if/when milder approaches are rebuffed.

**Curfew laws:** Some curfew laws have been overturned through lawsuits, others upheld, but rarely have lawsuits convinced other cities to drop their laws. In the 1990s, youth rights activists in such places as 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. It's much easier to stop a proposal than to overturn a law. NYRA's website offers information that can help you argue effectively against a curfew: <http://www.youthrights.org/curfew.php>

Curfew laws are constantly sold to the public as "anti-crime" measures, but much of our literature shows ways to show this is a lie – curfew laws don't decrease crime, they *increase* it. People's movement is being restricted for no other reason than when they were born. Most people, when you challenge them properly, respectfully, and intelligently, can see pretty quickly how wrong it is. 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/opposin-g-a-curfew-part-3/>

**Drinking-age reform:** Anyone who has traveled abroad knows the United States' drinking age is abnormal. Internationally, the United States is almost alone with a

drinking age of 21. America's internal widespread indignation over the drinking age make it an attractive target for youth rights activists. However, the federal government withholds highway funds from states that don't have a drinking age of 21, and this has driven egalitarians to seek creative 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.

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. NYRA's website has plenty of information to 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 is out of our reach for now, there are many voting age issues your chapter can work for on a smaller scale. The 26<sup>th</sup> 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 work 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. It is valuable to research whether or not your state allows municipalities to lower their voting ages independent of the state. 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.

While lowering the voting age on a state-wide level is a more difficult goal, with time and organization you can launch such a campaign if inroads are made at the local level. 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 often happy 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

Most students have never written an editorial or even a letter to the editor. Few have protested or made signs, flyer, or did the things that large demonstrations require. No problem. NYRA is here to help. Below is a guide to the common tools of activism.

### Writing An Effective Letter to the Editor

There are a few main things to remember when writing to a newspaper, and these hold true whether writing to a school newspaper, a local, or a national publication.

- 1.) **Be Concise:** Keep it short and to the point. Letters to the editor are often subject to strict word-limits (250 words is common) because editors get many letters and need to fit as many as space allows. Don't exceed these limits. Good writing is generally pithy and even the best-written letter will generally be edited for clarity or length by the editor. Make sure every sentence you write furthers your point. The first sentence should immediately reference what article or issue you're talking about, and the next sentence should explain your take on it. The rest of the letter should focus on why your view is valid. Explain as much as needed for the reader to understand your point, but don't go beyond what is needed. You have a limited space to make your argument - make it count. And be sure to use your word processor's word-count feature to ensure you meet the length-limits.
- 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. Many letters to the editor 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.
- 3.) **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 if writing on behalf of your chapter.
- 4.) **Have the Letter Signed by a Titled Officer:** Although not required, it helps to have the letter come from the president of the chapter, even if the president didn't write it. Just let the best available writer in your group draft the letter and then have your president review it and sign it. Otherwise have the letter 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 the First Time:** Editors get swamped with letters every day; oftentimes they select only a few out of many possible submissions. This is true even with small, local papers, and it's even more true with large, national ones. But persistence and practice will pay off. And even the letter that doesn't get published will help the cause. If the editor gets several letters expressing similar points of view, he will know to take the viewpoint more seriously, and it increases the chances he will print at least one letter expressing that view.

## WRITING AN EFFECTIVE OP-ED PIECE

Having an Op-Ed appear in a paper can be quite a boost for your chapter. These pieces are longer, generally get more readers, and show that the paper considers your point to be made well enough to deserve serious column space. Getting one printed will require writing skill and remembering what it is that papers look for in writing. Keep the following in mind:

- 1.) **Once Again, Be Concise:** Just because you've got more space than with a letter to the editor doesn't mean any words should be wasted. Every word should be essential to the flow of your argument. Professional writers understand that writing economically is the key to writing well. If you find a sentence that doesn't further support your argument, either rewrite it or remove it. An average length for Op-Ed piece is 500 – 600 words. This is less space than it sounds like.
- 2.) **Be Organized in Your Writing:** Remember that 5-paragraph essay your English teachers always wanted you to write? That tends to work for an op-ed. 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 is fine) until you reach the last sentence in your paragraph, which is generally the statement you'll be arguing throughout the Op-Ed. Make sure the last sentence is the strongest of the paragraph; this is the one idea that you want to have stick in people's minds after they read your piece. This is the "thesis statement."
  - b. *Second – Fourth Paragraph, Support:* The next 2 – 3 paragraphs 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 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. This is the last thing the reader will see, so make sure it's something he'll want to remember.

- 3.) **Be Persuasive, Not Inflammatory:** 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 harsh labels. Calling a proposal or person "Idiotic" "Foolish" or "Stupid" can easily stop people from listening. Instead, try words like "Needs Further Thought" or "Ineffective." In general, you will persuade more people with facts and reasoning than with opinions. You'll persuade more with nouns and verbs than with adjectives.
- 4.) **Should You Take Advantage of "Youth Focus" Sections?:** 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. We advise aiming for the main Op-Ed section, but settle for a youth focus section if that's the best you can get.
- 5.) **Once Again, Include Contact Information:** 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:** 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 the first time, you'll have found what works and you can try it on another paper, or write for the same one on something else. Prove yourself to be a voice on a certain issue and that paper might interview you for news articles.



## HOW TO GET ELECTED LEADERS TO LISTEN

Many assume that elected officials don't care what youth have to say. Laws and ordinances in many cities and states seem to reflect that reality. But when youth get involved, political leaders and policy makers often *enjoy* talking to youth. Here are a few tips for getting elected officials to not only talk to you, but to take your views seriously:

- 1.) **Make an Appointment:** This should be common sense, but to some it isn't. Politicians are busy. Call their office and ask when they'd be available to meet with a constituent. Be sure to let them know you represent a NYRA chapter. The mere fact that you represent NYRA makes you more important than if you only represent yourself, so that increases your chances of getting an appointment.

If you can't get an appointment with the lawmaker himself, it may be worthwhile to make an appointment to speak to his staff. Staff have the lawmaker's ear, they pass along information and ideas, and can give you a good sense of what the lawmaker may be willing to do on your issue. In politics, it is generally the staffers who write laws, propose ideas, advise the elected official, and do the nuts-and-bolts work 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.

Once you get that appointment, of course, make sure you show up. If for some reason you cannot make it, be sure to call as soon as you can to let them know. Standing up a lawmaker or his staff will hurt your image and hurt NYRA's.

- 2.) **Look Presentable:** Politics is one of the few businesses where a suit is seen as everyday attire. Don't under dress for a meeting with a politician otherwise they'll think you're not taking this seriously. Dress professionally.
- 3.) **Ask Questions:** Don't just walk in making demands. 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.
- 4.) **Stress What You've Done Already, and What You Hope to Do in the Future:** A politician will give your arguments and ideas more thought if they see 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, and the more the politician will want to work with 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.
- 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 impact as a good letter writing campaign or petition drive. Sometimes organizing a phone call drive can work even better. 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, be sure to say who you are and where you live. (Politicians take you more seriously when they know you live in their district.) Specify which issue/bill you're interested in. Then launch into your argument. Keep it respectful, but make your position clear. Use as much evidence and objective support as you can, while keeping the letter to a one-page maximum. As always, be concise.

Some more tips:

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

- 2.) **Making Phone Calls:** Don't expect to reach the politician you're calling; you'll likely get an aid or an intern. Don't worry. Politicians rely on these people to tell them what their constituents think. Many elected officials keep extensive records about who called their office and why. If enough people call about an issue, the politician will know about it.

Keep it short; specify the issue 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, it's best if you can give the bill number when you call. Make sure you are clear which side of the issue you stand on.

*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:

## ADVERTISING FOR EVENTS

The easiest way to advertise events on your campus is putting up flyers. Here are a few things to remember flying and other ways to promote your event.

- 1.) **Make the Flyers Interesting:** You'll likely be competing for attention with several other flyers. Find some way to stand out. Each campus is different, but there are 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 headline. (Assuming an iPod is one of the prizes, of course.) Color is good, but difficult since color printers are more expensive. Colored paper, however, may be available cheap. Bold letters, interesting fonts, anything to draw the eye.



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

- 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 everywhere though. Depending on the environment of your school you could do something like the classic "SEX!" in really bold letters and then below it, in smaller font, "Now that I have your attention, come to \_\_\_\_\_." Some schools might forbid a such a "racy" tactic, so decide strategically which tactic is best.
- 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 School's Institutions to Your Advantage:** If you have a student run newspaper, see if they'll do a story about your event. This 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. Most colleges, and some high schools, have a school e-mail system; have your event put in the regular announcements of things going on around campus.
  - 4.) **Word of Mouth:** You have friends, and your friends have friends, hopefully lots of friends. Get them all talking about it. Tell everyone you know. Get enough people talking and people will come.

## HOLDING A PROTEST

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. You'll go to a lot of unneeded effort, and the official will use it against you, claiming he would have worked with you had you used reasonable methods.

A protest seeks to do two things. Raise Awareness about an issue and Bring About Change. You will 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, then do something eye-catching and noteworthy. 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.

Whether it's a protest march, a sit-in, or some other method, 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 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!") Make the issues clear.

- b. **Pick a Location**: If your protest is big enough to block traffic in a public street, you'll want to go to City Hall to get a permit. If you're protesting on private property, the owner may call police to have you removed. If you're in a shopping mall, you generally have the right to peacefully protest in areas open to the public (look up *Pruneyard Shopping Center v. Robins* online).
- c. **Advertise**: You want as many people as possible to come to the protest, or at least see it. So flyer. Get your school or local paper in on it. Put up signs anywhere and everywhere.
- d. **Let the Games Begin**: If you've planned and advertised properly, things should go off relatively well. If it doesn't, don't be discouraged. Protests often need time to grow.

For more on protesting, read this article: [http://www.proyouthpages.com/schools\\_hakeup.html](http://www.proyouthpages.com/schools_hakeup.html).

And for even more, read Saul Alinsky's classic book *Rules for Radicals*.

# 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 2/3<sup>rd</sup> vote held at the first meeting of the chapter.
  - b. This document may be amended following ratification by a 2/3<sup>rd</sup> vote held at any annual meeting of the chapter.