



CHAPTER HANDBOOK

Congratulations on starting a NYRA Chapter! In this handbook you'll find information on how to run a chapter, make a campaign plan, and select the best tactics to meet your goals.

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STARTING A NYRA CHAPTER

Our Chapters are an important part of NYRA and play an essential role in the fight for youth rights. As a NYRA Chapter, you will focus on changing laws and policies in schools, communities, and at the state and federal levels. You will also have the opportunity to educate the public about issues that affect all young people by challenging age discrimination and prejudice young people face in our daily lives.

You can use your NYRA Chapter to work on a variety of issues, whether it's lowering the voting age, fighting a local curfew, or repealing your school's uniform policy. NYRA Chapters also organize events to raise awareness around ageism through protests, rallies, or informational meetings. You can also use your chapter to bring together people who can support each other to be effective activists. NYRA Chapters can be school-based or community-based. They can be intergenerational or made up entirely of young people. Some chapters start from scratch; others are well-established groups that want the extra support from NYRA.

We provide our chapters with personalized, on-call guidance and support from our Outreach Coordinators.

Registering your Chapter

Whether you are starting a completely new group or registering a group that already exists, you should fill out our [Chapter Application Form](#) to get started. You should have at least one person selected to act as a contact person for your chapter. You will also be encouraged to pick out a chapter name. Chapters are usually named after the school, town, or county they are located in. If your group already has a name, you can continue using it. Once we receive your application, one of our Outreach Coordinators will contact you.

You don't need to be fully formed or have your first meeting yet to register - we will take you through that process. And if you don't have other people interested, we'll give you some ideas on how to get the word out and encourage people to become members.

CHAPTER RESPONSIBILITIES

When you register to be a NYRA Chapter, you are acknowledging responsibility for the following:

1. Running a Campaign

This will be the main responsibility of your chapter and will be the focus of most of your time and energy. We help chapters tackle a wide array of youth rights issues, and your chapter is free to work on any campaign you choose to, as long as it fits with NYRA's mission and is approved by your Outreach Coordinator. Most campaigns will work on both creating awareness on a issue and changing a policy or law.

2. Managing the Chapter

Chapter management includes finding new members, becoming an officially registered group at your school, running meetings, and letting others know about your chapter's accomplishments.

Much of this work is connected to running a campaign. For example, if you host an informational meeting about your issue, you should use that opportunity to sign up new members to your chapter as well. Likewise, much of the work that focuses on having your chapter run smoothly, such as facilitating a meeting, will be an essential part of an effective campaign.

3. Representing NYRA

While NYRA chapters are independent entities, they do represent the organization as whole and should only take on issues that address age discrimination or prejudice. Chapters are also required to abide by NYRA's mission and follow our anti-discrimination policy.

Chapters are also not allowed to speak out against any position that NYRA holds. For example, a chapter may work on lowering the voting age in a town that also has a curfew affecting people under 18. That chapter is not obligated to

work on the curfew law as well (although many chapters have taken on both of these issues). However, the chapter should not speak out in favor of the curfew, as this goes against NYRA's official position on juvenile curfews. If you have any questions about NYRA's positions, please talk to your Outreach Coordinator.

Chapters are also prevented from engaging in violence or any other activity that would damage NYRA's image.

4. Staying Connected with NYRA's National Office

When you register your chapter, you will be contacted by a NYRA Outreach Coordinator. Your coordinator will help you get in touch with other members in your area, help you come up with a campaign plan, and walk you through the next steps. You are responsible for staying in contact with your Outreach Coordinator regularly, at least once a month.

MANAGING YOUR CHAPTER

Making Decisions

Whether your chapter consists of two people or 35, you will need to figure out how to make decisions. There are many places (such as school) where one person makes all the decisions for everyone else. But this isn't much fun, so your first goal will be to determine how to make decisions that involve as many people as you can, without spending so much time debating that you don't have time to move on to the action stage.

Most groups will make the big decisions at their meetings, often by voting on a proposal after discussing it. Some groups choose to pass a proposal if everyone agrees (consensus decision-making), while others will only require a majority of the group to agree (democratic decision-making or voting). There are pros and cons to each method, and what you choose may largely depend on the dynamics and personalities of your members. What you don't want is to just have one person or a small group or clique making all the decisions without input from other chapter members.

Well-functioning chapters make all members feel that their contributions are important. Encourage group members to share their perspectives, encourage equitable participation, and check in regularly to see if the process is working for the group. The most important piece is that everyone feels listened to. Encourage collaboration.

Two important things to keep in mind when making a group decision are whether it's controversial (if many chapter members have strong opinions about it one way or the other) and whether it's important.

- If a decision is both important and controversial, it is best to have a large group discussion until you reach something close to a majority, to make sure that everyone's voices are heard.
- If a decision is controversial but unimportant, it is best to have a small group or subcommittee split off to discuss it, since it will take a long time to make the decision, but it's not worth wasting the entire chapter's time on.
- If a decision is important but not controversial, it's best to have a simple majority vote with the full chapter since members will want to impact the decision, but won't care about it enough that it's worth taking up time to discuss.
- If a decision isn't important or controversial, assign it to a member with a specific position.

Assigning Tasks and Responsibilities

Your next task will be to develop a system for assigning tasks and responsibilities. This is so everyone knows who is doing what and you don't duplicate each other's work. (You only need one person to contact the media, for example.)

Make a list of possible tasks

Here are some tasks that chapters might need at the beginning:

- Organizing meetings (e.g. picking a time when everyone can make it, picking a room)
- Facilitating the meeting (e.g. making sure everyone gets a chance to speak)
- Reaching out to other groups
- Taking notes
- Managing the chapter's funds (e.g. if your group does any fundraising or is given a school budget, someone will need to keep track of those funds.)
- Promoting your chapter on social media
- Working with the media (e.g. being available to conduct interviews)
- Welcoming new members and getting their contact information

Remember this list can change as your chapter grows and takes on new campaigns.

Form a committee if needed

Sometimes it might make sense to group tasks together and form committees to work on them. Committees are usually just a few people that might be responsible for something specific, such as planning an event. You can form a committee when you want to do work outside of the meeting, but the job is too big for one person to do alone.

Assign each task

Dividing up tasks helps everyone to feel included, makes the work easier, and also helps ensure that your group continues if some members leave. Remember that everyone has a role to play. Including people helps them feel responsible for your group's success.

It is always best to get input from your members about how they want to help and what skills they can each contribute. Instead of having one person assigning positions, it may be best to let everyone choose specific tasks they want to do and then give them positions based on the work they're doing already.

You might not have enough people to do all those roles, so people can have multiple responsibilities as long as they can follow through on them.

When you assign tasks or form committees, make sure the following gets addressed:

- **What is the person or committee responsible for?**
- **How and when does the person or committee report back to the chapter?**
Agree on a schedule when you will check in to review progress (every week, two weeks, after each task, etc.)
- **What types of decisions, if any, can the person or committee make on its own without getting approval from the larger group?** Some chapters may only allow committees to research or recommend an action, while others may require them to report back only when the work is done. How you do this will be up to your chapter.

Rotate tasks

While one person or committee may be responsible for a particular area, it's important that the work doesn't fall on one person and that someone else can step in if someone gets overwhelmed or needs help. You can also rotate roles on more frequently - by having a different facilitator and note-taker every meeting, for example.

Providing Support and Useful Feedback

After assigning tasks, you'll want to have a system for making sure the tasks get done. It may make sense to assign someone the job of checking in with others and making sure things are going smoothly, especially for new members. However, this person does not need to have any authority over the others reporting to them, and should primarily act as a support person. Supporting chapter members means ensuring that people have the help and resources they need to do their job the best way they can and are able to ask for help if they need it. People in your chapter should feel comfortable providing feedback to each other. When you check in with people or provide feedback you should:

- **Be positive.** Focus on what they are doing right and avoid complaining. People shouldn't feel bad or anxious if they didn't do what they said they would.
- **Ask questions and be an active listener.** Ask them how the work is going, including what is going well and what they are having trouble with. Ask them what they think the solution is or what changes need to be made.
- **Don't micromanage.** Helping people get things done isn't the same as telling them exactly how to do it or doing the work for them.
- **Make yourself available for follow-up.** Often when people hear feedback they'll want more clarification later. Let them know that you are available to support them and how they can get a hold of you.

Meetings

Meetings serve many purposes - getting everyone up to speed on who is doing what, planning the next steps, and making sure tasks don't fall through the cracks. Meetings can also be a time to get to know each other better, build morale, socialize, inspire each other, and have fun! It's a good idea to have a regular schedule for your meetings. Most chapters meet once a week or every other week. Having food is also a good idea and can strengthen the chapter's community if members volunteer to pitch in.

Making an agenda

An agenda is the plan for what you are going to discuss at the meeting and the order you are going to discuss it. It helps people stay on track so that the meeting doesn't drag on or people go off on too many tangents (although it should be flexible enough to allow for discussion of things that come up). If you can, it is a good idea to make the agenda available to people before they come to the meeting so they know what to expect.

Things to include in your agenda:

- A review from last meeting - what has been done since then
- Any announcements or things that have come up
- A list of tasks that should be done before the next meeting and who will take responsibility for them
- A plan for when you'll meet next
- You can also use your agenda for taking notes. Share notes with the members who couldn't make the meeting.

Facilitating a meeting

- Start on time. You can wait a few minutes for people to show up, but if you wait too long people will think they can show up late because the meetings don't start on time.
- Consider having an icebreaker or check-in question.
- Pass around a sign-up sheet asking people for their contact info. This will allow you to generate an email list and keep track of how many people are attending meetings.
- Stick to the agenda. Meetings that get off track are often unproductive.
- Include time to welcome new members, introduce them, find out their interests, and inform them about your group.
- Be flexible. Sometimes important issues arise that cannot wait to be addressed.
- Encourage participation. Balance those members who tend to talk all the time with those who speak infrequently or only when asked.
- This is the best time to assign task and responsibilities. Keep track of who has committed to what, and follow up with those members.
- Be positive and enthusiastic.

Communicating Outside of Meetings

Develop an efficient system of communication for your chapter. Sometimes that's email, but it can also be group texting, Facebook Messenger, or another free program like Slack.

Use this way of communicating to remind people of the next meeting and of their commitments, and to thank each other for your work. If you keep your notes online, you can provide them to the people who were absent. You can also use this as a way for people to add things to the agenda that they wish to discuss. It is important to communicate with members individually to show them that they're an essential part of the team. Give everyone some sort of responsibility for each meeting so they feel

obligated to show up. If there isn't any advocacy work you can give them, give them another responsibility such as bringing food, giving people rides or reserving the meeting space.

PROMOTING YOUR CHAPTER

Telling people about your chapter and recruiting new members is a crucial step in making sure your chapter is sustainable. Most of the work in promoting your chapter will be closely tied to your campaign, but here are some general tips.

Recruitment and Involvement of New Members

- **Create a good first impression.** Make sure newcomers see that you are organized, have effective meetings, and are excited about your work.
- **Be friendly and inclusive.** People join groups partially because they care about the issue, but also as a way to socialize and make new friends with common interests.
- **Actively recruit new and younger members.** As a youth-led organization, it is important that your chapter constantly encourages new members. This is especially true for school-based chapters, where members will eventually graduate.
- **Incorporate newcomers into your chapter right away.** Take the time to find out what brought them to your event and identify their interests, skills, connections to other groups, availability, and how to stay in contact with them. Encourage people to take on responsibilities to make them feel included.
- **Make sure your chapter involves people from a diverse set of backgrounds.** This is important to the success of your chapter, because certain issues may go unaddressed if the same type of voices are heard over and over again. People have very different relationships with their schools or parents, or may have personal experiences that will help to inform how your chapter handles where ageism intersects with other issues such as racism or mental health.
- **Follow up with everyone within a week of any event, and thank them for their participation.** Ask what they liked, how they see themselves getting involved in the future, etc. Let everyone know that you value their perspective and are interested in their involvement.

Registering as a School Group

Many NYRA chapters decide to register as an official group with their school or college. This isn't a requirement, but depending on your school, you can get many benefits -

such as a place to meet, a way to promote your group through school announcements and club fairs, resources to organize events, and a budget.

If you become an official group, you might be required to have a faculty advisor. Faculty advisors can help you interact with your school's administration, recruit new members, and be a valuable member of your team.

Look up the rules and benefits of becoming an official school group to see if it is right for you. Your Outreach Coordinator can help you with this process.

MAKING A CAMPAIGN PLAN

Before you dive into managing a campaign, you should make a campaign plan, which is your strategy for creating change in your school or community. Your campaign plan will help you figure out how to choose an issue, identify goals, and select which tactics will be the most effective.

STEP 1: CHOOSE YOUR ISSUE

Examples: Voting rights for young people; student decision-making at school

Many chapters already know which issues they want to work on, but for others it can be useful to start thinking about what issues people in your community care about. As long as the issue fits with NYRA's mission of challenging age discrimination and prejudice, chapters can pick their own issues to focus on. Your Outreach Coordinator will give you guidance on what issues NYRA covers.

You can work on as many issues as you want. Working on more than one issue has the advantage of spreading your message further as people who might only be interested in one topic will hear about other youth rights issues through your work. This can also help people understand how multiple problems are caused by age discrimination. However, making change around even one issue is difficult, so you may prefer to focus your time and effort toward one issue to maximize your impact. If you do take on multiple issues, you should budget your time and resources so that you can run each campaign effectively. You can also try to pick issues that naturally go together: You might be trying to change a school policy that is set by the school board and also want to work on lowering the voting age so that students can vote for school board members and hold them accountable.

Support from others in your school or community will be critical for your success, so if you are undecided which issue(s) to take on, a short opinion poll could be helpful in determining what level of support exists for various issues. Surveys can help you determine which issues are most popular as well as help you do outreach in your community.

Whether you've already decided on an issue or are still at the brainstorming stage, you should be clear about why this issue is important and why people should care about it. **Try to identify how this issue negatively affects young people, both in general and in your local community, and how your community would be improved if this issue was resolved.** Be clear about your reasons for seeking change and learn more about the arguments that support your position (lots of which can be found on NYRA's website).

STEP 2: IDENTIFY YOUR GOALS

Examples: Repeal the juvenile curfew in your town; reduce penalties for underage drinking on campus

Now that you've chosen an issue, you need to think of the specific change you want to see. People who hear about your campaign will ask you, "What are you trying to achieve?" Your answer to that question is your **primary goal**.

However, you should also identify **secondary goals**. Secondary goals can be smaller goals that are easier to achieve and can act as stepping stones to the bigger goal. An example of this might be having a moratorium on a school policy until you can replace it with something better, such as getting your school to adopt alternative disciplinary measures while campaigning to abolish corporal punishment in your state.

Secondary goals can also act as back-up goals if your initial goal becomes unachievable. For example, your city council may refuse to abolish curfews entirely. But maybe you can get them to agree to make the curfew later or to make sure there are exceptions to the law. While compromising can feel like you failed at your original goal, it is still a victory that can still improve the situation.

Once you've identified some potential goals, you can evaluate them by considering the following:

Route to Success

Your route to success is what needs to happen in order for you to achieve your goal. For example, if you want to get rid of your school's dress code, you will need to find out the how the current policy can be overturned. If you are working on lowering the voting age, you'll need to find out whether your city or town has the ability to change the voting age for local elections, or whether you need to go to the state level. We can help you research laws specific to your area.

Decision-Makers

Once you outline a route to success, you should be able to identify the precise decision-makers involved. This will not only help you know who to contact, but will help you figure out which tactics will be most likely to be successful. For example, if your legislator is up for re-election they may be concerned about getting the youth vote (though note that NYRA chapters are not permitted to campaign for or against any candidate). Or if the school policy you are trying to remove was implemented by an unpopular administration, you can use that to increase your support among teachers and parents. When possible, it is usually better to maintain a positive relationship with decision-makers to maximize the likelihood of their cooperation. However, you should not feel be afraid of confronting them.

Obstacles

Undoubtedly, your route to success will have barriers along the way, and it is helpful to identify them so you're prepared. Obstacles can be both internal (such as your chapter doesn't have many members and you all have busy schedules) or external (your school board only meets once every two months). They can be things like not having enough money, a difficult principal, or people's ageist attitudes.

Potential Allies

While other people directly affected by your issue are obvious potential supporters, you should also think about potential allies in other areas. In fact, many youth rights issues have been championed by people who had never previously heard of the youth rights movement. For example, groups that advocate for voting rights in general might also be interested in lowering the voting age, and people concerned about policing may also be concerned about juvenile curfews. Try to find out whether any work has been done on this issue in your community already.

Current and Needed Resources

You should think about which resources you have currently and which resources you need to get. Resources include anything from posters for a protest, a venue for meeting and holding workshops, or connections to other organizations.

Once you've identified what you need to do to accomplish your goal, you will have a better idea of your likelihood of success. Of course, just because a goal seems difficult to achieve doesn't mean you shouldn't choose it. It can be exciting to take on a challenge. But you should make sure that people don't feel discouraged or that your resources would be more valuably spent elsewhere.

STEP 3: SELECT TACTICS

Examples: Testify in front of the school board; plan a school walkout; organize a teach-in to raise awareness

Now that you have a goal, you'll need to figure out how to accomplish it. This will be the biggest part of your plan. Later, in the Activist Toolkit section, you'll find details about how to implement different tactics, but here we'll talk about how to select which tactics are available, and evaluate them so that you can choose the best ones for your particular situation. Before you select a tactic you should consider the following:

- **Will this tactic help build your chapter?** You'll want to use tactics that are enjoyable and that will encourage others to participate. Tactics should also help people feel positive about your chapter and build cohesion in your group. If people get bored with one tactic, switch it up!
- **Will you be able to sustain this tactic if there are negative consequences?** Some tactics, especially those that take place in school, come with the risk of punishment. For example, some schools have suspended students for boycotting standardized tests, and have also attempted to fire the teachers and fine the parents who support them. You should try to predict potential risks so that you don't have to abandon a tactic before you're ready.
- **Does this tactic show a positive image of youth leadership?** Your tactics should be youth-led and challenge negative stereotypes against young people. If you do this, even if you don't achieve your goal, you have accomplished something worthwhile.

- **How will this tactic look to people outside your chapter?** Depending on the tactics you choose, people will have different reactions to your campaign as some tactics are more likely to polarize your community than others. For example, some teachers and parents might support you testifying to the school board about your dress code, but wouldn't be supportive of a school walkout protesting it. Of course, this doesn't mean you shouldn't organize a school walkout, as they have lots of other benefits, but it is something to be aware of.
- **Do you have the support and resources needed to make this tactic a success?** While there are many things that one person can do, some tactics will work better depending on your level of support. For example, a business owner probably won't listen to a few dissatisfied customers, but they will likely listen to a mass outcry from the neighborhood and any disagreement with your school's administration should seek support from teachers and parents. You should also make sure you have the needed resources for this particular tactic, such as posters, flyers, or a good social media following to get the word out. If the success of a tactic relies on significant resources, consider whether you can tweak the tactic to use less, but still achieve at least part of your goal. Let your Outreach Coordinator know if you need any materials.
- **What tactic will you do if this tactic fails?** It is a good idea to have a backup plan in case things don't go the way you want. You should also figure out when to keep fighting or change tactics (or even your goal).

ACTIVIST TOOLKIT

Once you know how to evaluate tactics and choose the best ones for your situation, you can start using them. We have outlined certain tactics in our [Activist Toolkit](#), which you can find on our website. There are many more tactics not listed there (and we are continuing to add to it), but you are definitely encouraged to come up with your own. Again, contact your Outreach Coordinator for any questions you may have.

APPENDIX

OUR MISSION

NYRA is dedicated to defending the freedom, equality, and rights of all young people by challenging age discrimination and prejudice.

NONDISCRIMINATION POLICY

NYRA does not and shall not discriminate on the basis of race, color, sex, gender identity or expression, religion or creed, age, sexual orientation, national origin or ancestry, mental or physical ability, economic standing, or military status, in any of its activities or operations.

