

BECOMING A GRASSROOTS ADVOCATE

LGBT rights, voting rights, immigrant justice, sexual assault on campus, incarcerated youth, women's health and economic justice are just a few of the issues an SPLC on Campus club can choose to address. Have you discovered a social justice issue that you're passionate about? Are you ready to do something to create positive change? Before taking action to address the issue, you should take a moment to learn how to be an effective grassroots advocate.

SEVEN STEPS FOR EFFECTIVE GRASSROOTS ADVOCACY

1. Identify the issue you want to address.

2. Research your issue. Education is key to being an effective advocate.

3. Conduct an inventory of existing campus and community resources that could support your advocacy work on this issue.

4. Identify leaders and organizers on your campus and in your community. Find out more about the work they're doing. Explore ways to collaborate with these leaders.

5. Create a list of goals and map out the parts needed to fulfill each objective. For example, if you'd like to host a film screening and discussion about voting rights, map out the steps needed to accomplish this goal (finding a venue, securing speakers or panelists and marketing the event, etc.).

6. Check your bias. It's imperative to acknowledge that we all have biases. We recommend taking the Implicit Association Test to uncover yours. It can be taken at implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/education.html.

7. It's critical that you recognize the privilege you have relative to those directly affected by the issue you're addressing. For example, you are a college student. Not everyone can claim this title and you should recognize the privilege that comes with it.

SUCCESSFUL OUTREACH

After selecting an issue and researching it thoroughly, you'll need to investigate how it is affecting people in your community. In talking with people, you'll likely become aware of new dimensions to the issue not uncovered by your research. Successful outreach can be a matter of taking a few key steps.

1. Develop good communication skills: Be consistent about what you say and remember that manners matter. When conducting outreach, always introduce yourself and where you are from.

2. Be aware of barriers: Cultural differences and life experiences can create barriers to understanding people. It's important to be aware of these barriers and do your best to understand them in order to communicate effectively.

3. Be empathetic: When a person tells you about a problem, it is important to view it from their vantage point – even if it differs from your perspective.

4. Conduct outreach with peers: Two is better than one when it comes to ensuring safety. Try not to wander too far away from each other when conducting outreach in a community. If someone invites you into their home, always stand between the person and the door. Remain aware of your surroundings at all times. Always exercise caution.

5. Bring educational outreach materials: This will make the most of your visit. You should always have contact information – an email address, website or phone number – you can share with people interested in your cause.

CREATING A COALITION

Coalition building is important to maximizing your club's impact and achieving its goals. Some partners to consider are professors, Greek organizations, service groups, community- and faith-based organizations, youth and parents, business and community leaders, and local unions. Thinking of someone not on the list? Reach out to them and explore the possibilities. The stronger and more diverse the network, the better.

TIPS FOR COALITION BUILDING

1. Ask key questions

- How can SPLC on Campus build relationships through this coalition?
- Is there an existing coalition on campus or in the community with similar goals?
- How does this coalition benefit your SPLC on Campus club and its goals?

2. Be clear about structure

- How formal will the coalition be – what structure will it take?
- Who will lead the coalition?
- How will decisions be made?
- How will disagreements be resolved?

3. Use the coalition to spread your message

- Send a sign-on letter for organizations to affirm their commitment.
- Create materials and information packets. Information packets can be used to educate elected officials and decision makers. Packets can also be used to recruit new members and organizations.
- Contact local press to raise awareness about your efforts. You are more likely to receive media coverage if you plan an event. (Details on event planning follow.)

PLANNING AN EVENT

Events are a great way to raise awareness on issues and call people to action. They can also be used as a recruitment tool for your SPLC on Campus club. Here are other questions to consider as you plan your event.

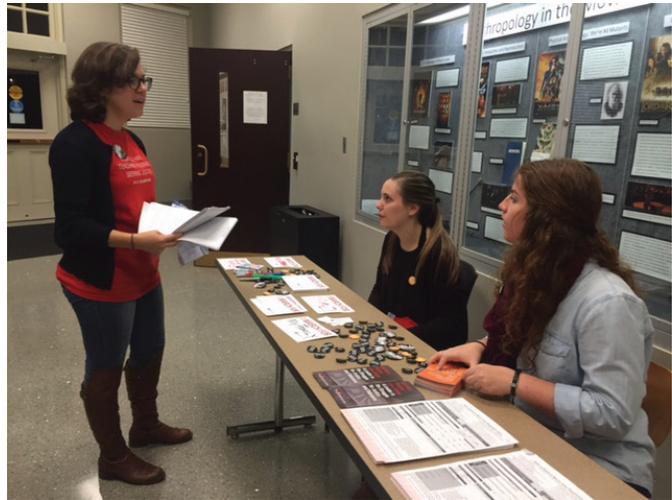
1. What type of event are you planning? There are lots of ways to convey your message: a community forum, panel discussion, rally, film screening, press conference, training or seminar.

2. Who is your audience? How do you plan to market this event to reach your target audience?

3. What needs to be done to pull off the event? List everything that needs to be handled before, during and after the event.

4. Create an event agenda.

5. Assign club members specific responsibilities.



EVENT SPOTLIGHT

When Alabama closed several driver's license offices in poor, minority communities – potentially preventing people from obtaining the photo ID needed to vote in the state – the University of Alabama and Auburn University SPLC on Campus clubs decided to do something.

The clubs held events focusing on voter rights by screening Teaching Tolerance's *Selma: The Bridge to the Ballot*. The club at the University of Alabama invited panelists to their event to discuss voter suppression and what college students could do to help. Auburn University's SPLC on Campus worked with the Lee County League of Women Voters to register students, staff and community members at their event.

6. Prepare and gather all needed materials.

As you prepare to host an event, it's important to remember why you're hosting it. What do you want the event to accomplish? What do you want participants to do after your event? Write down the answers to these questions and share them with your planning team. This will help the team stay on the same page and achieve your goals.

GLOSSARY OF ORGANIZING TERMS

Alliance: A long-term relationship involving two or more organizations that is built upon a shared vision for addressing a common set of issues.

Coalition: A short-term relationship involving two or more organizations that is built upon a single issue or single common interest.

Community organizing: Building a base of people to empower their communities to achieve social change through their collective power. Community organizing is used to create campaigns that promote institutional change through the mobilization of human, financial and political resources.

Constituency: A group of people whose interests are served by your organization or campaign.

Goal: A broad statement that describes what a person or group wants to accomplish.

Institution: A public or private power structure that governs individual and/or societal behavior. Its power is maintained and enforced through laws, customs and traditions.

Institutional change: When a public or private institution changes its policies, procedures and/or practices.

Objective: A specific statement that describes the steps to achieving a goal in a timely, measurable and quantifiable manner.

Problem: A problem is something that, in the opinion of your constituency, lowers the quality of life or otherwise impacts the community negatively.

These terms and definitions were provided by the Center for Third World Organizing in Oakland, California, and adapted by the Southern Poverty Law Center.

DIVERSITY GLOSSARY

Ally: Someone who supports and stands up for the rights and dignity of individuals and identity groups other than his or her own.

Bias: A conscious or unconscious preference that prevents a person from being impartial.

Class: A mix of resources including, but not limited to, money, culture, contacts and education.

Classism: The institutional, cultural and individual practices and beliefs that assign different values to people according to their socioeconomic status.

Community: A group of people connected to one another through a common identity, set of experiences or shared purpose.

Culture: The patterns of behavior and thought people living in social groups create, learn, share and pass on to others inside and outside of the group. Culture may include beliefs, traditions, language, art, food, and political and economic systems.

Ethnic group: A group of people who share a common culture, language, history and geographic origin.

Oppression: The systemic mistreatment by one group of people over another that is reinforced and supported by a society.

Prejudice: An attitude, opinion or feeling formed without adequate knowledge, thought or reason.

Race: Socially constructed concepts that place people in categories based on physical characteristics – not biological facts. The term has attained sociopolitical significance as a tool for oppressing and advantaging groups of people.

Racism: The combination of systemic power and racial prejudice.

Sexism: The societal, cultural, institutional and individual beliefs and practices that privilege men, subordinate women and denigrate values identified with women.

Social power: Access to resources that enhance the chances of getting what one wants and influencing others.

Stereotype: A fixed image, exaggerated belief or distorted truth about a person or group of people that does not allow for individuality, critical judgment or social variation.

System of advantage: An unearned set of opportunities that, in certain circumstances, benefit specific groups of people. These benefits negatively affect members of other groups.

Targeted: Individuals who belong to a social group denied access to resources that increase the chances of influencing others and getting what one wants.

CLASS CHARACTERISTICS

Poor: People without access to adequate resources such as food, shelter, health care and clothing. They often live in transitional housing, staying with relatives, friends or in temporary government housing. Employment is often temporary.

Working class: People with sporadic access to resources that are not necessarily available to everyone in the household. Members of this class often live in apartments or “backhouses” in low-income areas. They usually remain employed in the same field, but not with the same employer.

Middle class: People with adequate resources and some privilege or status through education or a “white-collar” job. They often live in apartments and houses, in and out of low-income areas.

Wealthy: People with more than adequate access to resources. They receive, and often expect, privileged treatment in society. Members of this class are well-educated – often holding advanced degrees – though this is not always necessary for their upward mobility, which often occurs through contacts within the same social class. If employed, they typically work at the executive level.

These terms and definitions were developed by Diversity Matters and adapted by the Southern Poverty Law Center.