

# Starting a club at your school? here are some tips

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So you're thinking of starting a club huh? No matter what grade you're in or what school you go to, clubs are a fantastic way to meet new people with common interests. When I started high school four years ago, I was essentially one of the new kids, as I had transferred into a new district and didn't know anyone. Looking back, the best thing I did to become more involved and integrated in my new community was join and start as many clubs as I could, meeting new people and figuring out who I wanted to be on campus. With our environmental club, my co-presidents and I run our school garden and have established a school-wide recycling and composting system on campus. With my club Bags for the Ocean, we collect t-shirt donations and make them into reusable shopping bags to distribute in our community. If you want to start a school group to make a difference, here is a quick guide to starting your own club on campus.

1. Check your School's Rules Most schools make the process of starting new clubs easy so that as many students as possible are empowered to start their own clubs. But the first and most important thing is still to check these rules and procedures to ensure that your club complies. Your club should of course be school-appropriate and inclusive. Once you've ensured that your club will meet the standards in place by your school, it's time to start the process of applying to become a club. Of course, this all depends on your school's individual policies.

At many schools, official clubs are established at the beginning of the year and then operate for the remainder of the school year. If this is the case in your school, be proactive about turning in your club forms and registering, as you would hate to miss the date and your chance at establishing your own

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club for the year. Often these forms require you to find an advisor and write up a budget. To find your advisor, chat with some of your favorite teachers or those that you think would be most interested in working with your club. Finding an advisor is especially important because theirs will most likely be the room you use for meetings and because they're your contact on the administrative side of your school. If this all seems like a lot, don't panic; if you have a good idea of how you want your club to function and what you want to do, then finishing your club forms and finding a teacher should be a breeze.

Never be afraid to ask for help with all of this from whatever student or administrator is in charge of new clubs at your school; they'd be happy to get you all set up! 2. Recruit! Once you've been registered as a club, it's time to build your attendance. Most schools will hold a club fair where students can visit booths of all of the campus clubs to learn more and join. If your school has an opportunity such as this, make sure to get registered to host a table for your club! In my experience, the best way to attract other students to your table is with food or candy and with a fun table for people to visit. As everyone wanders around to your table, offer them some candy and chat with them about what your club is about and why they should join. Have a sign-up sheet where people who are interested can write their name, email, and phone number so you can get in touch with them about meetings and club events.

Making posters and hosting booths at club day are both great ways to recruit, but sometimes it's hard to get students from writing their name down or noticing a poster to the point of actually participating in your club.

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Try and get personal with students about joining; it's much more compelling to individually ask students to attend fundraisers, to run events, or to volunteer at certain times with your club than it is to send out mass emails. Get students committed to individual meetings and fundraisers so that they can get a feel for your club and get excited about attending your next event!

3. Announce your Club to Classes Teachers can be incredibly supportive of all of their students clubs and pursuits, so in certain cases a great way to amass club attendance is using your classes as a platform to advertise your club. If you're starting a group dedicated to something related to one of your classes, talk to the relevant teachers outside of class about whether you can make a quick announcement about your club to the class, or whether students could get extra credit for attending. Make sure to think critically about in which classes it's appropriate to advertise and respect however the teacher feels about you speaking.

For example, I've always gone around and done a quick advertising pitch for the environmental club in all of our school's AP environmental science classes as the club directly relates to the class, and the students from APES who attend certain meetings get extra credit for the class. Talking to classes is a great way to advertise your club directly to the portion of the student body that might share an interest in your club as they are taking a related class. 4. Talk to Local Organizations Having guest speakers at your meetings is a great way to make them more fun and educational for everyone there. You can have them attend to do presentations, share info, or just hang out and chat with students. Finding an organization or person to come present

takes a little time and research but is incredibly beneficial in the long run as it will drive new people to come to your meetings.

If your club has to do with politics or activism, send an email to some of your local politicians to invite them to join your club for lunch. Or, if your club is focused on entrepreneurship, invite the founder of a local business to present about how they got to where they are now. The moral of the story is that for any club you start there is someone in your community who'd love to come share their story with young people and answer any questions you may have for them. You might find that this leads to other ways for your club to get more involved with the community and make an impact.

### 5. Set Goals

As a club of students, it's important not to bite off more than you can chew when you're setting goals.

The quality of the planning process directly correlates to the quality of the outcome. In my time running clubs, I've found that you get the best results if you as a club dedicate yourselves to one event, fundraiser, or goal per semester or year. Setting goals for hosting community events, fundraisers, shows, or whatever your club may be interested in is one of the most important ways to lay a foundation for your club's success. These goals help unite all of the members of your club under a common purpose and give everyone a common purpose to work towards. Make sure to delegate responsibilities, plan, and organize as a group early on for the most success.

You can't do the whole thing yourself - and it won't be fun for anyone else if you do! Speaking of...

### 6. Keep it a Democracy, not a Dictatorship!

If have a tendency to micromanage as I do, you might be inclined to assert yourself as

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the boss of your club and it's undertakings, but resist this urge and take a step back.

The most successful clubs are the result of group participation and work towards a common goal. Give responsibilities to other club members and really listen to their ideas. No one wants to go to a club that they don't feel like they're apart of. As a club president, it's your job to foster teamwork within your group and inspire others to take initiative for themselves. In the end, you'll all have much more fun delegating jobs and working as a team than you will feeling like the team boss.

7. Have Fun! In this stressful world of high school life, full of standardized testing, APs, and college essays, it's tempting to just join and start clubs to check a box on your college application or as a resume piece. The clubs that you're a part of will be the most successful if they're more than just that. They should provide a sense of purpose, help the community, teach people something, or be a way to meet people and have fun together. Don't forget to make your meetings fun to attend and to get something done; this very important balance will keep people coming back.

Whether you're starting the women in STEM club or the fun socks club, it should be because you're excited about putting the time in to run it, not because you think it'll look good. 8. Focus on the Long Term To maintain a successful club, it's important that it continues after you're gone. Although your graduation may seem far away now, trust me, it hits you far quicker than you'd think. Make sure that you put the time into recruiting underclassmen to take the club over after you've graduated. Find students

that are as genuinely excited about your club as you are and talk to them about the behind-the-scenes work you do to keep the club up and running.

If your club continues even after you leave, you have not only made the impact that you worked for in your four years of high school, but you've also left a lasting tradition and mark on your school that will keep inspiring new students and giving them a place on campus. Make sure to keep records and start fun traditions that similarly carry on after you. All of the graduating leaders of my environmental club get to paint their names onto a brick in our school garden and plant a tree for our graduating class. As we amass our small forest, all of our younger members look forward to when they can add their name to our beloved tree and plant a tree in honor of the lasting impact they've left on their campus. In the End, Your Club is what You Make it! Your interest or passion in a subject is usually what motivates you to start a club, but it's not enough! Organization, hard work, and a willingness to put yourself out there, plan ahead, and work with other students and community members are all factors in how your club will grow and what it can do. But if you're willing to make a plan and stick with it, you can see your club grow over time and become an integral part of your campus community.

Good luck! P. S. If you are passionate about the environment and want to start a club focused on spreading the use of reusable bags and reducing plastic, check out Bags for the Ocean at [BagsFortheOcean](http://BagsFortheOcean.com). Weebly for ideas on how to start your own club!