

27. Excerpt from Student Leader (aka “Campus Coordinator”) Manual

**DEMOCRACY
MATTERS**
Change Elections Change America

**CAMPUS COORDINATOR
MANUAL 2001**

SAVE THIS MANUAL AND ADD TO IT!!

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DEMOCRACY MATTERS COORDINATOR MANUAL

This manual is written for Democracy Matters Coordinators. It can serve as a source of ideas and as a good reference point. But it is not a substitute for your own creativity and the unique organizing style you will develop on your own campus. It is your commitment, your originality, and your ability to elicit and make use of the ideas of everyone involved in Democracy Matters that will make it successful.

Please save the manual and add your comments to it during the year. This is a living document that will evolve through ideas arising from your experience. In structure, the manual represents Democracy Matters' general approach to organizing:

- Educate yourself.
- Inform others on your campus & community.
- Mobilize people to work together for democracy -- to change elections and change America.

I. Educating Yourself and Others

The first requirement for effective organizing on the issue of campaign finance reform is for coordinators to be so familiar and so comfortable with the issue that they can teach and argue effectively for getting private money out of politics.

To this end, Democracy Matters staff will provide training in two phases. First we will send materials to coordinators beginning in June, and initiate an email dialogue among staff and

coordinators concerning these issues. We also will encourage coordinators to attend summer conferences related to money in politics (in 2001 that means the Public Campaign annual conference in DC, July 13-15).

Second, staff will provide training sessions immediately before school begins in August/Sept, and during the academic year. To the extent possible these sessions will cluster coordinators whose schools are in a particular geographic area. Q & A on money in politics, sample talks on campaign finance reform by coordinators, how to respond to critics, and organizing strategies and tips will be the focus of these sessions.

Once you have a group of students on campus working with Democracy Matters, you will need to help them to learn about money in politics too. Using materials from the summer tutorial with Democracy Matters staff as well as your own ideas is essential. You don't want this educational process to drag on so long that it turns people off or be so thorough that it tries to cover all aspects of campaign finance reform. At the same time, however, students must have a working knowledge of what they are talking about and what they are fighting for.

II. Connection to Democracy Matters

The link between campus coordinators and Democracy Matters staff is a close one. On the one hand, Democracy Matters offers resources to coordinators in the form of materials, experienced and dynamic speakers, and ideas for programming, as well as connections with coordinators and Democracy Matters groups on other campuses. In addition, the Democracy Matters' website (<http://www.democracymatters.org/>) serves as a communication vehicle among campuses and

between staff and Democracy Matters groups.

But more important even is the close mentoring relationship that exists between staff and coordinators. On-going discussions of organizing strategies, organizational forms, coalition building, as well as conversations about issues in campaign finance reform and their connection to broader issue of participatory democracy will be constant during the academic year. Staff will want to learn from coordinators about the specific situations on each of the Democracy Matters campuses, about what works best on that campus and what succeeds less well in engaging students there. Coordinators and student activists' creativity and ideas will be the basis of success of Democracy Matters on any campus.

Within the general framework of advancing student interest and activism on campaign finance reform, staff will work with campus coordinators to develop organizing strategies responsive to the needs of specific campuses and to the unique strengths and interests of coordinators there. Students will know best how to reach out to the entire student body to get them thinking about money in politics.

Frequent phone consultations and campus visits by staff will occur throughout the academic year. Campus coordinators will be expected to keep a running written log of activities, strategies, participation, contact lists and other important information that will allow Democracy Matters and its student organizers and activists to build continuity and expertise over time. Coordinators will also contribute ideas and information for the Democracy Matters website to share with other campuses. Constant email contact and updates are of course important as well.

We hope to raise enough funds to plan a Spring conference where Democracy Matters students from all campuses can come together to share ideas in person. In addition, staff will be looking for opportunities for campus groups to spend a day or a weekend on another campus.

III. Organizing on Campus

The central task of a Democracy Matters coordinator is to interest and activate as many students as possible around the issue of campaign finance reform both on campus and in their community. We want to try to reach out to EVERYONE, though not all at once of course -- you will need to develop a plan about how to do this. Different groups on campus will have different interests and may require slightly different approaches.

A number of different organizational models/ideas might serve this purpose, depending on the circumstance on a particular campus. Much of what follows is based on an organizing manual developed by SEAC (Student Environmental Action Committee). We want to thank them for the hard work that went into putting together their terrific ideas for campus organizing.

Organizing is the most important way we as activists can ultimately create positive social change. All other progressive movements in the past have made changes in our society by organizing: the labor movement, the civil rights movement, the antiwar movement, etc. Like these movements, organized together we can be many times more powerful than we are as individuals.

A) Starting A Group

Starting a campus chapter of Democracy Matters is one organizational model. This has the distinct advantage of giving the group legitimacy on campus, allowing students to take advantage of the university's resources, and providing a clear identity for participants. How frequently the group should hold meetings is a judgment call by the coordinator in consultation with members, but three important considerations need to be kept in mind:

- 1) People like to feel as if they are an important and accepted member of a supportive group;
- 2) Each member should have her/his own area of responsibility which is an explicit part of the overall group goal;
- 3) The group needs to remain open to, and in fact see as a primary goal the recruitment and inclusion of others.

B) Knowing Your School and Community

The first step is to become familiar with your school. There are a number of questions you want to answer:

- What other activist groups are on campus? (get to know them and their leaders)
- How do other groups organize?
- Who are the campus leaders?
- How do you "officially" register a new group?
- Is there student activity money available for campus groups?

- How do you get these funds?
- Do you need a faculty sponsor?
- How do you reserve rooms to meet?
- Where do people gather?
- What other progressive groups exist in your community?
- What support can these groups give?

Often there is a student activities office, or student government offices which will help you answer some of these questions, but don't get bogged down in the bureaucracy. You will be learning about your school all year, so don't let a lack of information stop you from organizing the group.

C) Student Activities Night

Recruiting students can be done a number of ways. Almost every school has a First Year Orientation where you can reach out to new students. See if you can include something about Democracy Matters in the packet of information going to First Year Students or their advisors. Try to find a way to talk to First Years for five minutes about Democracy Matters. Don't forget, first year students are looking for a way to get involved. Help them out!

Soon after school starts there is usually a Student Activities Night for the whole campus where groups set up tables and sign up participants. This is **VERY** important. Democracy Matters should be well represented at a well placed table with brochures and information to hand out, colorful posters to attract people, and buttons to give away. Democracy Matters will supply all of

these for you. Try to get two or three of your friends there to help you recruit and to talk to others about the exciting stuff Democracy Matters will be doing. Be sure to have a large sign up sheet where they can print their name, address, email etc. Free candy works wonders too!

Posters and letters to the student newspaper announcing your meetings also are a good way to keep recruiting new activists.

D) Initial Planning

You may want to get a small group of people together to help you plan and do publicity for a kick-off meeting. Use word of mouth and small-scale advertising to find out who else might be interested in helping.

It is important not to let this planning group become an “in clique.” Be sure not to set anything in stone until an entire group can vote on it. Otherwise, it may become very difficult to get other people to join and to be active in your group.

E) Outreach

Outreach is one of the most basic tasks in organizing. You should always be trying to bring new people into the group. Remember, how and where you reach out to people will determine the kind of group you will create. If you only talk to white students, or if all of the people in the planning group are men, the group will lack diversity. Below is a simple plan for outreach.

- 1) Answer the Question: Why would someone want to join this group? (It may be different

for different people, but the answer should be a part of all the outreach you do.)

2) General Publicity: You want to broadcast far and wide that a group is forming or reforming. There are a thousand different ways to do general publicity. They include emails to individuals and email lists, posters, leaflets, table tents (folded leaflets on cafeteria tables), chalking the sidewalk or blackboards, banners, ads or articles in the campus newspaper, Public Service Announcements on the campus radio, putting notices in a daily bulletin, bathroom graffiti, skywriting, word of mouth, street theater, ESP, blaring it over a bull horn at lunch, etc. The more people hear about you, the more likely they are to attend. Remember to put the time and place of your kickoff meeting on everything, as well as contact info.

3) Lists: Develop a list of interested people. Only about 1/3 of the list will probably attend meetings, but it's a base with which to work. You may want to set up a table in the student union, cafeteria or other places where people gather. Have pens and paper out for people to sign up with contact information. Hint: put your name on the list - no one likes to be "first." You may also want to give 2-3 minute presentations to amenable classes. Don't forget to mention the time and place of the meeting. After the presentation, pass around a sign up sheet for "people who want more information."

4) Personal Contact: Make one-on-one contact with the people on your lists to remind them about the kick-off meeting and learn about why they are interested in the issues. You can also go to their dorm rooms (if you are at a school with dorms.) or eat lunch with them.

Personal contact is more effective than e-mails, but if you don't have the time, a small reminder is better than nothing.

5) Coalition Building: Speaking at meetings of other campus organizations emphasizing the links between their issue (environment, civil rights, safety, women's issues etc.) and campaign finance reform and democracy is also a good idea. Ask them to co-sponsor an activity with Democracy Matters, or devote part of their own activity during the year to talking about the need for campaign finance reform.

F) Kick-Off Meeting

The Kick-Off meeting is the first big event your group will do. The goal of the Kick Off meeting is to get people involved with the group and motivated to do something about campaign finance reform. It should be fun, interesting, and participatory.

The first step is to take care of logistics. Pick a time when the most people are able to come. Don't panic! There is no perfect time when every one can come. Try to pick a time and place that can stay the same each week. Set a goal for how many people you want at your meeting (be ambitious). Then reserve a room that you think will be a little too small. When you pack a room it creates an incredible sense of excitement. There is nothing worse than empty chairs at a kick off meeting. Try to find a room with movable chairs so you can sit in a circle.

If it's possible, get food for your meeting. That will keep everyone in a good mood. Another mood-saver is to start and end roughly on time. You want to convince people that the group is a

good use of their time.

During this first meeting, it's important for everyone to give introductions. Go around the room and get people's names and favorite word or some other icebreaker. Immediate, friendly introductions are very important. If people feel uncomfortable they won't come back. It's a good idea to start all meetings by having people go around the circle and introduce themselves or just "check-in" with how they are feeling. Pass around a sheet to collect everybody's name, phone number and email.

It is a good idea to explain what Democracy Matters is about and present its principles. New students are often not familiar with the many possibilities of issue campaigns that can be worked on. Explain that your group is about making lasting change. Explain some of the history of the campaigns the group has been working on other campuses.

Depending on how many people you have at the meeting, you should get an idea of how many campaigns the group can tackle at once. List some potential issue campaigns along with a few ideas on what can be done to achieve the goals of the campaigns. If others have ideas for campaigns, you may want to entertain them at the first meeting (this can take a lot of time, though) and ask them to write up a mini-proposal for next week's meeting. Their proposal should include some ideas on how the campaign can achieve change and on what targets, strategies and tactics can be used.

If your meeting isn't very interactive, you might want to go around the room to make sure

everyone gets a chance to speak. Try to keep the discussion focused without stifling anyone's creativity - group decisions tend to be the most productive, and ideas that seem strange at first can end up being visionary. It is vitally important that everyone feel that they are involved in the decision making process, that they have a personal stake in the group. Once people feel like they are taking orders or being ignored, they will tune out and never come back. Above all, make things fun and informal.

At the end of the meeting agree on the time for the next meeting. The meeting time should be a proposal (same time net week?) and decision, not a long discussion. Don't simply ask, "When should we meet next?" It will take all night to decide. It might be a good idea to have some simple action planned that involves everyone on a burning issue that relates to a possible campaign the group could adopt. It might be a quick poster or letter writing campaign. Whatever it is, have it prepared before the meeting. This will blow people's minds, as most groups don't start taking action at the first meeting. Mark yourselves as a group that doesn't just sit around and talk. (For descriptions of various action campaigns that campus coordinators have created and implemented on their campuses, please see the Democracy Matters website: http://www.democracymatters.org/StudentOrganizing/Action_Campaigns_To_Get_Started.php)

On the other hand, talking isn't all bad. It's a nice idea to have the people hang around afterwards to talk to new folks (not each other!), develop friendships, and answer questions. Food helps! Now that you have an informal group going, it is important to establish an effective and democratic structure that will assist in transforming your initial enthusiasm into action.

Note: The Campus Coordinator Manual continues (see Table of Contents) with more tips about how to organize a group on campus, expand the group's activism to the surrounding community, and forge connections with state and national organizations. For a copy of the entire manual, please contact:

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