

**28. Documents from Student Leader (aka “Campus Coordinator”) Training:
“Deepening Democracy,” “Creating the Tools of Political Citizenship,”
and “Evaluation Sheet”**

**Deepening Democracy: Changing the World by Building a Youth Base for Replacing
Money with People as the Driving Force in American Politics**

Today, we are taking up two issues. First, how do sociologists think about social problems and social change? Second, how do we deepen democracy in the United States?

Any effort to deal with a social problem by creating social change has to inform people about a problem, propose a solution, and offer people ways of taking concrete steps that can remove the problem by implementing the solution.

We have talked at length about the problem of money in politics, and clean money as a solution. Now, I want to turn to next steps. What can you do to replace money with people as the driving force in American politics?

Students often remark that they believe in an issue but “do not know what to do” to show support for the issue. What underlies this is a sad fact of modern life. Most people have never been taught how to exercise their rights as a citizen in a democratic society. Hence, they lack a political toolkit.

Once they are educated about a problem and a solution. They do not know what to do next.

For sociologists, creating social change requires altering both culture and structure. Typically,

conscious social change comes about through collective action. Collective action occurs when people do three things:

1. Organize a core group of friends
2. Raise awareness in their community
3. Get people to take actions that alter both culture and structure

We need a tool-kit for accomplishing these three steps.

Remember Margaret Mead's statement: "Of course a small group of people can change the world; nothing else ever has."

Ways to Participate In a Democracy: Creating the Tools of Political Citizenship

PART 1: TOOLS FOR RAISING AWARENESS:

1. Actions a Citizen Can Take To Inform Their Peer Networks

Get your friends to agree to take a pledge. They agree to do one of the following (you pick):

- a. Get people to agree to tell one person a day about your group and the issue for a week. Some people call this "lettucing." People agree to informally talk about your group and your issue while they are standing in line at the cafeteria, waiting for the bus, or during some other mundane activity.
- b. Get people to agree to email other people about your group and issue for a week. These can be

a casual. At they are emailing people about other things, they just happen to mention your group and the issue. “Did you hear about what Adam is doing? He is starting something called Democracy Matters. He told me that...”

c. Get people to agree to host a study break. They would invite 5-10 friends. You would bring a pizza and talk to people about the issue. This is really fun. At the end of the break, you can ask people to agree to do either of the previous actions (a or b).

2. Actions a Citizen Can Take To Inform Their Community

Get students to agree to do the following:

- a. Write a letter to the school newspaper in support of your group or issue.
- b. Write an editorial to the school newspaper in support of your group or issue.
- c. Carry fifty leaflets and leave them at various places at school. For example: show up to class ten minutes early. Leave the leaflets on every seat. Students will read them as they come to class.
- d. Identify a reporter at the school newspaper. Set up a meeting with them and convince them to write about your group.
- e. Give people a one page leaflet and get them to agree to hang them in ten places.
- f. Get people to agree to be your liaison with a specific social group. They would disseminate your materials, and talk to people about your group in informal conversations.

PART 2: TAKING ACTIONS

3. Educating People in Your Larger Community

These require a bit more preparation. You might ask students to work with your group to do one of the following:

- a. Go speak to a high school class.
- b. Go speak to a local civic association—a Rotary club.
- c. Go speak to people at a senior center.
- d. Go stand in a public place (a park or outside a post office). Hand out leaflets and talk to people about the issue.

4. Helping Pass a Piece of Legislation

It is easy to get people to do things to support passage of legislation. Remember- legislation gets passed when people support it. The only way to build support is to talk to people and convince them. This means doing many of less “everyday” actions listed above. There is nothing more effective than getting people to agree to talk to other people, to host small study breaks for you, and to hang materials for you.

- a. Write a letter to an elected official.
- b. Make a pledge, “When I am old enough to vote, I agree to vote for public officials who support this issue. This will be a litmus test issue for me. I also pledge to talk to my parents and to ask them to vote for public officials who support reducing the role of private wealth in politics.”
- c. Make an appointment to go see a staff member of an elected official to talk about this issue.
- d. Go to a public appearance of an elected official and ask a question about this issue.
- e. Participate in a campaign. Try to locate local groups working on an issue. See what you can do to help build support to pass a piece of legislation.

Evaluation Sheet: Raising Awareness and Taking Actions

For each option address three questions: (1) feasibility—will it work, (2) desirability—are the potential benefits, and (3) planning issues—obstacles to be overcome.

Then evaluate it (1 to 5).

1	2	3	4	5
Bad Idea	Probably Will Not Work	Ambivalent	Probably Will Work at Least a Little	Great Idea

Option #1: Spreading the Word: (Get people to agree to tell one person a day about your group and the issue for a week. Get people to agree to email other people about your group and issue for a week).

Option #2: Host a Teach-In: (Get people to agree to host a study break)

Option #3: Working With The School Paper: (write a letter to the school newspaper in support of your group or issue; Write an editorial to the school newspaper in support of your group or issue).

Option #4: Leafleting: (carry fifty leaflets and leave them at various places at school; Give people a one page leaflet and get them to agree to hang them in ten places).

Option #5: Coalition Building: (Get people to agree to be your liaison with a specific social group. They would disseminate your materials, and talk to people about your group in informal

conversations).

Option #6: Speak To Groups: (high school classes, local associations)

Option#7: Grassroots Lobbying: (Stand in a public place and out leaflets and talk to people about the issue, go door-to-door).

Option #8: Help Pass Legislation (lobby elected officials, participate in a campaign, take a pledge)

ONE GREAT IDEA THAT COULD BE DONE AND SHOULD BE DONE: