

Americans for Democratic Action

Organizing Manual for New Chapters

*The purpose of this manual is to assist interested liberals in the formation of new chapters of
Americans for Democratic Action.*

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Why form an ADA Chapter?

For six decades ADA has been unique in providing liberal leadership in the nation. We have organized other groups into united action on civil rights and civil liberties, environmental protection, economic equality for all, and many other issues. ADA has successfully lobbied Congress to support key liberal votes and built an extensive network of grassroots activists who effectively seek change in local communities. Whether it is extending city benefits to domestic partners, fighting for economic policies that benefit every American, creating responsible foreign and military policy and more, ADA members take the lead.

An ADA chapter will give your community a liberal voice. Chapters serve as vehicles for political action within the community and organize grassroots support for national ADA efforts. Chapters endorse and support candidates for municipal and state offices, often urging one of their members to enter a campaign to further ADA programs. ADA chapters give progressive programs the visibility they need and educate the public on issues.

Realistic Considerations in Forming an ADA Chapter

YES, ADA would like to have a chapter in every city in the nation but that goal is not as realistic as it may appear. Forming a chapter and holding a successful organizing meeting with a well-known speaker is relatively easy. Keeping that chapter going year after year, is something else. To have any hope of success, a new chapter must consider the following prerequisites.

- The community itself must have a liberal base waiting to be organized. The ADA Constitution requires 25 members to form a chapter but that is merely a technicality. A successful chapter will need a larger membership base to keep things lively and to lessen the likelihood that all responsibilities fall on just a few people. Reaching this number will take some time but in our experience the enthusiasm of a few is infectious.
- A minimum of 5 people among the organizers must hold ADA as their PRIME organizational interest. ADAers admirably belong to numerous organizations and often have one to which they devote most of their efforts. Organizing is hard work. A new ADA chapter needs a lot of attention by people willing to make it their principal effort.
- People joining ADA should be prepared to have an impact on the local community. The national organization addresses itself to national and foreign issues and many chapter members are eager to hear speakers and voice their opinion on those issues. That is fine, but it cannot be your only purpose. The most successful chapters are those engaged in activities and issues within their own communities. The principal tenet of grassroots organizing is to work from the ground up. To be effective, chapters MUST get involved in municipal and state issues.

ADA Constitutional Requirements for a Charter

Membership

Any person of any age, religion, race, ethnic or national origin, sex or sexual orientation who accepts, in good faith, the basic principles of Americans for Democratic Action, Inc. as set forth in its Constitution may be a member of the organization.

Chapters

Chapters are granted by the National Board or the Executive Committee if the following requirements are met:

- 25 or more members in good standing must apply for the charter. Satisfactory evidence must be presented that the group seeking the charter accepts, in good faith, the basic principles of Americans for Democratic Action and is prepared to organize a chapter that will strive to work in cooperation with the leaders of liberal and progressive organizations on local and national issues.
- Upon submission of a minimum of 25 membership applications, accompanied by payment of dues to the national ADA office, a resolution for chartering will be brought before the Board or Executive Committee.

While it is the intent and desire of ADA to encourage effective chapters in as many communities as possible, the Board and/or the Executive Committee has the power to de-charter chapters whose membership and program are insufficient to enable them to maintain sustained activity on behalf of ADA's programs and principles.

Getting Started

A. *Forming A Charter Committee*

1. The five or more persons described under *Realistic Considerations in Forming a Chapter* constitute your Charter Committee.
2. Initial Goals of the Charter Committee:
 - a. Research potential chapter membership in the community especially in relation to existing liberal organizations. Is there a “need” for ADA in the community?
 - b. Seek out community leaders who might lend their names to your organizing effort. Will they sponsor, join or address your organizing meeting? Will they sign or join others in signing your meeting invitation?
 - c. Compile a mailing list of potential members. Possible sources for names include the ACLU, Common Cause, political campaign lists, Democratic Party lists, unions. The national ADA office can provide you with a list of existing ADA members in your area.
 - d. Prepare a list of priority issues facing the community. Refer to ADA pamphlet, *Organizing of a Major Issue Campaign*, for information on selecting issues. Ideally the Charter Committee should be in a position to suggest a specific project for immediate involvement by the newly formed chapter.
 - e. Prepare by-laws for approval at the organization meeting.
 - f. Prepare a *temporary* slate of officers and select a fixed date (about four to six months in the future) for the election of permanent officers. The temporary officers are elected to get things started. Most attendees at the organizing meeting will not know one another and will not be in a position to elect permanent officers.

Suggested temporary officers

Chairperson(s)

Vice-chairperson (one to three persons)

Secretary

Treasurer

National Board Representative

National Executive Committee Representative

B. *Planning an Organizing Meeting*

1. When, Where, and How!
 - a. Determine the format of the meeting. Should it be a luncheon, a dinner, or an evening meeting?
 - b. Will there be a major speaker? If so, should it be a local or national leader?
 - c. Select time and place of meeting.
 - d. Send out as many invitations as you can manage. Invitations should be mailed about three weeks prior to your meeting. It is wise to request an RSVP via a reply card, e-mail, or phone so that you can get a reading on potential attendance. The invitation is

very important. It is the determining factor in the quantity and quality of attendees. It is very effective to have the invitation signed by one or more leaders in the community. Insofar as possible, follow-up phone calls should be made just prior to the meeting.

- e. Keep the media informed of your plans.
- f. Circulate and/or post flyers announcing the meeting on college campuses, at meetings of other liberal groups or events, or where you think a potential member might see them.
- g. Do *NOT* charge admission to the meetings. Soft drinks and light refreshments should be gratis.

2. Determining the Agenda

- a. How long will the meeting last?
- b. Who will conduct the meeting?
- c. If you have a speaker, what will be the subject matter?
- d. Have you arranged for press interviews with speakers?
- e. Will there be a question-and-answer period?
- f. Who will make a “pitch” for membership?
 - * Have a staffed table located near the entrance displaying ADA literature and application cards. Ask everyone who enters or leaves to join.
 - * Prepare *Area of Interest* forms and ask everyone to complete one.
 - * Circulate an attendance sheet with space for names, addresses, phone numbers, and emails.
 - * Ask for contact information for other potential members.

3. Goals

- a. Having a sufficient number of members sign up to meet charter requirements. (Minimum of 25 persons; 10 for New Leadership for Democratic Action.)
- b. Establishment of the following standing committees either through appointing or by asking for volunteers as chairpersons and committee members.
 - * Municipal and State Issues Committee. (Campus Community Issues Committee for Youth Caucus Chapters.)
 - * Membership Committee.
 - * Fund Raising Committee.
 - * Press and Public Relations Committee.
- c. A *temporary* slate of officers approved.
- d. A set of by-laws approved.
- e. At least one project approved for chapter’s immediate involvement.
- f. A specific date and place announced for the next membership meeting.
- g. A specific date and place set for an Executive Committee meeting no later than two weeks from the date of the initial meeting to make definitive plans for the chapter.

- 4. At all levels of organization, keep in touch with the national ADA office by sending copies of all announcements, press clippings, etc.

The Follow-up

This manual is not intended to provide instruction on how to keep a chapter active and effective forever. No manual can accomplish that. A few steps can be taken early, however, that will prove helpful in the long run.

1. The Charter Committee cannot sustain the chapter indefinitely. It is essential to involve the entire membership in activities as early as possible. Responsibility must be delegated, not only to accomplish goals but to give the membership a share of the responsibility and a stake in the chapter's success.
2. Within a short period after chartering, a meeting should be called with the purpose of setting future goals and future program planning. If you know where you are headed, you will have a better chance of getting there.
3. A NEWSLETTER builds membership, keeps members and the public informed, gives your chapter a sense of identity and increases your income. The chapter should consider issuing one as early as possible.
4. MEMBERSHIP BUILDING is an on-going requirement for a successful chapter. Whatever effort the chapter is involved in, increasing membership should be a part of the planning and always kept in mind.
5. Initially, you will want to compile as large a mailing list as possible to solicit membership. After a reasonable period (perhaps 6 months) you should cut that prospect list down considerably as it could become expensive, nonproductive problem.

A Home for the Chapter

As early as possible after your chapter has been chartered you must find it a home.

In The Beginning:

1. E-mail. Use the internet. The internet is the fastest and cheapest way to communicate with your members. Set up e-mail addresses with a free service for your chapter or chapter contacts (e.g. MarylandADA@yahoo.com; ADAMember@hotmail.com). Some organizations have had great success using internet tools such as Meetup.com and Yahoo Groups. In addition, some internet service providers will give you space to design a website. The ADA National office may be able to offer web space as well. Establishing a presence on the web is an easy way to get your message out and to attract new members.
2. Order a phone, you cannot survive without it. It is important that members, potential members, the press and the public be able to contact you. A phone listing is essential. The phone can be located in a member's office or home but must be listed with the phone company and in directories under Americans for Democratic Action. A dedicated cell phone is also a great option.
3. And an Address. Every piece of literature circulated must have a return address. If recipients are expected to get in touch you with, they must have the information to do so. Your chapter address may be an officer's home or office but should remain constant and not moved from one location to another. It would be wise to acquire a rubber stamp with a temporary address and phone number to be used on all literature until a permanent address is established.

The Next Step:

1. Securing a permanent home and staff. A successful chapter requires concern, time, space, and money. The most active chapters maintain an office with at least one staff person. There is simply no good substitute for an employee whose prime concern is chapter building. To accomplish this takes money. Fund raising, therefore, is one of the most urgent and important tasks ahead.

Some Ideas on Fundraising

An ADA chapter cannot have serious impact in its community without money. Thus, every chapter should make fundraising a priority. Raising money will make it possible for you to do such things as staff an office, send out meeting notices, issue a newsletter, pay rent and phone bills. Don't let this frighten you, a good staff person will be able to raise his or her salary and more. Dedicated volunteers are also quite capable of raising all the money needed to create a successful chapter.

Keep in mind, to raise money you must ask for it; you cannot be shy. Remember these five keys to successful fundraising:

1. Be optimistic – don't be defeatist. Don't start with the attitude that the liberal pocketbook isn't deep enough to fund your chapter. There is money out there if you are willing to ask for it.
2. Set high goals. Small financial goals result in small contributions. Responsible people want to give their money to serious organizations.
3. Be professional. A professional approach will, once again, convince people that you are serious. Some chapters have been able to get free advice and cooperation from professional fundraisers in their community.
4. Finances are basic to every issue. No matter what issues your chapter wishes to address, you must have money to have an impact. Teach your membership that liberalism can't survive on love, ideas, or even action alone.
5. It costs money to raise money. Fundraising should be allocated a substantial part of your budget.

A successful fundraising program will include different types of fundraising, such as direct mail, one-on-one solicitation, events, planned giving, and online giving. The following are links that can help with each of these aspects of fundraising:

Association of Fundraising Professionals
www.afpnet.org

Planned Giving Today
www.pgtoday.com

Dr Charity
www.drcharity.com/directma.html

onPhilanthropy
www.onphilanthropy.com

Network for Good
www.networkforgood.org/npo

Email discussion forums on topics such as events, gift prospecting, planned giving, and online giving.
www.charitychannel.com

Record Keeping

The record keeping required by ADA is quite simple and can easily be done by the Chapter Treasurer or any volunteer.

Most of the information that follows is applicable only after your chapter has been chartered since you are not permitted to open a bank account in ADA's name before chartering.

Processing New Members' Applications Before Chartering:

Upon receiving a signed membership application card and payment of dues,

1. Make up a membership database as your permanent record.
2. Send membership applications to the national office indicating the person has joined the chapter.

Processing New Members After Your Chapter is Chartered:

1. Open a checking account in the chapter's name.
 - a. The account should require a minimum of two signatures for withdrawal of funds.
 - b. Buy a rubber stamp for endorsement on deposits.
2. Make an electronic database as your permanent record and keep it regularly backed up.
3. Enter as income on Receipts and Expenditure Record.
4. Deposit funds in checking account.
5. Send membership application to the national office.
6. Note that no funds are exchanged with the national office in this instance (see ADA Constitution and Bylaws).

Financial Arrangements with National ADA

The national office initiates a considerable number of mailings soliciting memberships. If a person in your chapter area joins as a result of those mailings, the person automatically will be made a member of your chapter and you will be so advised. There would be no money exchanged between the national office and chapter the first year so that the investment made by the national office to secure the member can be covered.

The converse is true as well. If your chapter solicits a new member, again, there is no exchange of funds. The chapter retains the entire first year's dues to cover its investment but all contact information must be sent to the national office.

Other Receipts and Expenditures:

Income to the chapter from sources other than dues is retained by the chapter to promote its programs.

1. Enter income on receipts and expenditures record.
2. Deposit funds in checking account.
3. Each quarter submit to the National office a finance and activity report (samples can be obtained from the national office).

Expenditures:

1. Check all invoices making sure the billing is correct.
2. Prepare check to cover invoice. (Remember, a minimum of two signatures is required)
3. Enter invoice and check information on receipts and expenditure record.

Sample ADA Chapter Constitution

Article I. (Name, Affiliation, and Purpose)

Section 1. This organization shall be known as the _____ Chapter of Americans for Democratic Action.

Section 2. This Chapter shall be affiliated with and subject to the Constitution of the national group known as Americans for Democratic Action.

Section 3. The purpose of this Chapter shall be the promotion of liberal and democratic principles and the advancement of freedom, justice, and human rights.

Article II. (Membership)

Section 1. Any person residing in _____ who supports the principles and purposes of Americans for Democratic Action may become a member of this Chapter.

Section 2. All members of the Chapter shall be entitled to hold office and participate in decisions and activities provided that they have been a member for at least thirty days.

Article III. (Membership Meetings)

Section 1. Membership meetings of the Chapter shall be held at least four times annually. Reasonable notice shall be given to all members.

Section 2. Special membership meetings may be called at any time by the Executive Board. Reasonable notice shall be given to all members. Such notices shall be in writing and shall specify the purpose of the meeting. No business except that specified in the notification shall be transacted at the special meeting unless agreed to by a two-third majority of those present.

Article IV. (Officers and Executive Board)

Section 1. The Officers of the Chapter shall be a Chairperson, three Vice-Chairpersons, one of whom shall be designated to act as Chairperson in his/her absence, a Corresponding Secretary, a Recording Secretary, and a Treasurer.

Section 2. The officers shall exercise the powers and assume the duties customary of their offices. The three Vice-Chairpersons shall be assigned to directorship of (a) Programming, (b) Fund Raising, and (c) Membership. The Officers shall have such additional powers and duties as may, from time to time, be conferred upon them.

Section 3. The Executive Board of the Chapter shall carry on the business of the Chapter between membership meetings, and exercise other functions herein authorized. The Executive Board shall consist of all officers designated in Section 1 of this Article and ten other persons elected for that purpose. All are representatives to the National ADA Board.

Section 4. Executive Board meetings may be called by the Chair or by at least one third of the members of the Executive Board. Members of the Chapter may attend Executive Board meetings.

Section 5. The Executive Board shall render a report to the Chapter of each regular membership meeting.

Section 6. The Executive Board shall provide for the maintenance of complete and accurate records of the proceedings, membership, and finances of the Chapter.

Section 7. The Chair, unless the Executive Board shall object, shall appoint such Committees as may be necessary for the work of the Chapter. The purposes, functions, and terms of office of the Committee members shall be clearly indicated at the time of their appointment.

Section 8. The Chair may not serve more than two consecutive terms in office.

Section 9. An elective office shall be declared vacant by the recording secretary if an Officer of the Executive Board shall have missed more than three consecutive meetings, either of the Executive Board or the Membership, or sixty percent of such meetings, in a six-month period. Upon due notice of such office being declared vacant, the Executive Board member may seek reinstatement at the next membership meeting. If the vacancy is not set aside by a majority of the members present and voting, then, at the next meeting there shall be an election to fill the remainder of the term of the vacant office, with the removed Executive Board member eligible to fill the vacancy.

Article V. (Elections)

Section 1. Officers and Executive Board Members shall be chosen in an election to be held annually in _____.

Section 2. Officers shall be elected by a majority of those present and voting. In the event that no candidate receives a majority of the votes cast, run-off elections shall be held with the person receiving the fewest votes being dropped until two candidates remain. The ten candidates receiving the highest number of votes shall be designated members of the Executive Board.

Section 3. There shall be a nominating committee which shall be appointed by the Chair subject to the approval of the Executive Board.

Section 4. At least thirty days, but not more than forty-eight days, in advance of the election meeting in _____ the nominating committee shall, at the membership meeting, submit nominations for Officers and Members of the Executive Board. Additional nominations may be made from the floor.

Section 5. Officers and members of the Executive Board shall be elected for a term of twelve months or until their successors have been elected and installed in office.

Section 6. In the event a vacancy shall occur in any office, such vacancy may be filled by a temporary appointment by a majority of the Executive Board. At the next membership meeting prior notice shall be given of the vacancy and an election held to fill the office for the balance of the term.

Article VI. (Dues and Finances)

Section 1. Dues for membership shall be the amount established by the Executive Board with the approval of the membership, in accordance with rules set by the National ADA Board.

Section 2. The funds of the Chapter shall be deposited in a bank and drawn up only by the Treasurer or Chair, both of whom shall be bonded for an amount set by the Executive Board, at the cost of the Chapter.

Article VII. (Removal from Office)

Section 1. Officers and members of the Executive Board may be removed from office for public political conduct in violation of the purposes of Americans for Democratic Action as set forth in Article I, Section 3. Such action may occur by a two-thirds vote of those present at a membership meeting called expressly for that purpose by a two-thirds majority of the Executive Board. The candidate for removal from office shall not vote in his/her own case provided that the Executive Board member or Officer shall have an opportunity to present his case at the membership meeting described above.

Article VIII. (Amendments)

Section 1. This Constitution and by-laws may be amended respectively by a three quarters majority of those present and voting at any membership meeting, provided that the text of any amendment by-law shall have been mailed to the membership prior to the meeting.