

# ACLU of Illinois Student Chapter Organizing Manual

The American Civil Liberties Union of Illinois (ACLU of IL) is a private, non-profit organization that seeks to promote and defend civil liberties through legal, legislative and public education programs. We are an affiliate of the National ACLU. There are 23,000 ACLU members in Illinois and over 500,000 nationwide. The ACLU of Illinois has a Chicago office, 180 N. Michigan, Suite 2300, Chicago 60601. A staff of 21 serves the state from the Chicago office. The chapter director works from New Lenox, IL, P.O. Box 506, New Lenox, IL 60541

The ACLU of Illinois is committed to empowering students to make their voices heard through public education and participation with other organizations in activities that promote civil liberties. Student chapters play a key role in encouraging students and young people to remain vigilant in retaining existing civil liberties and to work on behalf of those disenfranchised.

The ACLU of Illinois is grateful to students interested in creating a student ACLU chapter on the campus of undergraduate and law school campuses in our state. In order to organize an ACLU group at your school, students must agree to operate under the guidelines outlined in this manual. We hope that these will increase your understanding of your critical role in the success of the ACLU, and will assist you in our joint mission to promote and defend civil liberties.

If you are a college or law school student, you need to read and sign these Guidelines, complete the “ACLU of Illinois Student Chapter Registration Form” and adopt “ACLU of Illinois College and Law School Chapter By-Laws” or other approved By-Laws.

## **STARTING A STUDENT CHAPTER**

You have already taken the first step by contact the ACLU of Illinois. Your contact at the ACLU of Illinois affiliate is Mary Dixon, ACLU Legislative and Chapter Director: 815-462-5997, e-mail: [mdixon@aclu-il.org](mailto:mdixon@aclu-il.org)

In determining whether an ACLU chapter can succeed at your school you can begin by perusing our national and state websites: [aclu.org](http://aclu.org) and [aclu-il.org](http://aclu-il.org). You may have known of and read about the ACLU but not have known the depth and variety of our current and historical work. As the main chapter organizer, now armed with exciting information about the role of the ACLU, you should share with other students your interest in the formation of a chapter, gauging their interest in participating in ACLU activities. At a minimum, you should have at least five students interested in making the ACLU student chapter an extracurricular activity priority. At the beginning of the school year or earlier, discuss the possibility of a club with your peers and create a list of names and contact information for those who are interested in becoming involved. It is important to know that there is sufficient interest to maintain an active student group.

The next thing to do is to contact your school administration and get the written policies on student chapters or clubs. You'll then know the procedure for forming a chapter, the benefits chapters are entitled to, the responsibilities expected of student chapters and the administration's requirements regarding your having a faculty advisor.

\*Law school chapters should consider reviewing contact information and chapter contacts for the American Constitution Society at <http://www.acslaw.org> a fledgling group of lawyers, law students and left-leaning academics who have united to counter the better-known Federalist Society, a two-decades old group that promotes conservative thought and has taken on the role of watchdog of the American Bar Association. Collaborating on forums with this organization, offering assistance to these chapters with programs and other event of interest is encouraged.

## ESTABLISHING A CHECKLIST

You must comply with the following to become an official ACLU of Illinois student chapter and to remain in good standing.

1. Designate three contact persons (Primary Contact, Secondary Contact, and Faculty Advisor) for your Student Chapter. The Primary Contact is presumed to be the chapter chair or president unless indicated otherwise. Mail a completed "ACLU of IL Student Chapter Registration Form" to the Chapter Director. Copies may be obtained from the ACLU of IL website: [www.aclu-il.org](http://www.aclu-il.org)
2. Mail a copy of the Student Chapter By-Laws (or other document outlining chapter structure and procedures) to the Chapter Director. We have an approved version of the By-Laws available for your use on our website, [aclu-il.org/](http://aclu-il.org/)
3. Register with your school's student affairs office. Follow all guidelines for campus organizations established by your school.
4. Apply for available funding through your student affairs office and follow all financial guidelines. Fundraising activities must be on-campus only and must be approved by the Chapter Director. You may sell ACLU merchandise, such as T-shirts, etc. to raise funds by requesting merchandise from the Yesenia Sotelo ([ysotelo@aclu-il.org](mailto:ysotelo@aclu-il.org)), Membership Director. Under very limited circumstances a chapter may receive funds from the ACLU of IL to support a specific event by submitting a "Request for Funds" form to the Chapter Director. Forms are available on the affiliate website.
5. At least once every semester or quarter, e-mail or phone the Chapter Director to touch base and address any issues or problems. **Notify the Chapter Director of any changes in leadership, faculty advisor, contact information or chapter status immediately. Forward via e-mail chapter meeting minutes to the ACLU of IL Chapter Director.** This simply provides a way for the ACLU of IL Chapter Director to keep apprised of your chapter's activities and to assist whenever possible.
6. Chapter officers are expected to be or become ACLU members. ACLU membership is encouraged for all club members. Basic membership is \$20.00

annually and includes a membership card, subscription to the Illinois Brief, and a subscription to the national newsletter – Civil Liberties. Joining the ACLU is a personal commitment to the principles of freedom, justice and equality and the ACLU's work in defense of these ideals.

7. Chapter officers are welcome to attend ACLU of IL Board meetings and will be provided with the annual lists of Board meeting dates. The chapter chair or president will receive e-mailed copies of Board minutes to keep apprised of litigation and legislative efforts.
8. Chapter officers are encouraged to attend the annual chapter conference, a joint collaboration of community and student chapters around the state.
9. Chapter officers may have their chapter contact information listed on our website and are encouraged to subscribe to our legislative action alert via our website. Contact the Membership Director, Yesenia Sotelo with contact information for your chapter that you would like added to the website for the ACLU of IL.
10. Once you have the school's approval, an advisor (if needed) and a list of interested students, contact Mary Dixon, Chapter Director, to set up an initial meeting. Activities at your first meeting might include election of officers, approval of by-laws if necessary, and planning activities and events for the coming months. An ACLU of IL staff member will attend one of your first meetings and discuss current activities of the organization.

## **POLICIES FOR CLUB ACTIVITIES**

The ACLU of IL is here to support the students and advisors, and offer guidance, resources and ideas. Student groups must take positions that are within ACLU policy and chapter leaders are expected to consult with the ACLU of IL about their efforts on a regular basis. Sometimes there are questions as to whether an activity falls within the ACLU's mission of defending citizen freedoms under the Bill of Rights. We cover a broad range of issues: free speech, religious freedom, reproductive rights, GLBT rights, privacy, due process, discrimination and much more. However, there are many worthy causes (for example, organizing labor unions, supporting the release of political prisoners abroad) that are not part of the ACLU's work.

As an ACLU student chapter, you are not authorized to make statements to the media on behalf of the ACLU beyond your campus newspaper. If you receive an inquiry from the media, discuss it with ACLU of Illinois' Communications Director, Ed Yohnka ([eyohnka@aclu-il.org](mailto:eyohnka@aclu-il.org)).

All work must be done on a non-partisan basis. The ACLU does not endorse political parties or candidates, including in the student government context.

An annual summary of your chapter's activities should be forwarded to the affiliate Chapter Director via e-mail by May 31st annually. It is also highly recommended that you include in the e-mail any contact information for the chapter president during the summer months and a notice of any change of leadership for the chapter (i.e. contact

information for the incoming chapter president for the summer and, if known, for the fall semester.

## **Holding an Event Checklist**

1. Contact the ACLU of IL in advance of all public activities (excluding chapter meetings and informal social activities) by e-mailing the Chapter Director. It is helpful to fledgling chapters for the Chapter Director to know of and to be able to share successful ideas of other chapters.
2. Send by e-mail a brief event report afterward, including information on attendance, names and organizations of speakers, and a general sense of how things went. If possible, please also e-mail copies of publicity materials (flyers, posters) used for public events to the Chapter Director.
3. Contact the ACLU of IL Chapter Director prior to taking a public position on any controversial issue. ACLU of IL student chapters are free to discuss all sides of any issue (indeed, public debates with opposing groups can be very successful events) but may not take stances contrary to ACLU policy.

## **ACLU Chapter Website Policy**

The ACLU of Illinois' website serves as our "public face" to the world, informing the public about the ACLU of IL and the activities of all of our chapters. Our website is located at <http://www.aclu-il.org>

Postings on the ACLU of IL website represent the view of the ACLU of IL as an organization and must be in keeping with ACLU policy. Though its information is of particular interest to ACLU members and supporters, the site is accessible to everyone in the web community, including media, students and those who strongly disagree with the ACLU.

Within the ACLU website are pages for student chapters. We encourage student chapters to take advantage of this means of communicating with your student body and to keep fellow chapter members informed of local activities and events. Chapters may make use of this resource by regularly providing ACLU staff member Yesenia Sotelo, Membership Director ([ysotelo@aclu-il.org](mailto:ysotelo@aclu-il.org)) information to be posted on their web page.

To help people get in touch with the school chapter, individual pages may list contact information for one or more chapter leaders as well as meeting times and locations. This information includes full name, e-mail address, telephone number, and/or mailing address. When ACLU chapters have information they would like posted on their web pages, an authorized member of the club should contact the Membership Director with details.

Chapters may also create their own websites.

## FINANCES

ACLU student chapters should keep good records of income and expenses and provide regular financial reporting to their chapter leadership. As a rule, student chapters do not maintain bank accounts, as they do not have extensive funding requirements. Should a student chapter find that it is handling funds in excess of \$500 over a period of months and determines that having a checking account makes sense, the Chapter President should contact the ACLU Chapter Director to discuss options. No bank account should be opened in the name of the ACLU, the ACLU of IL or as a Student Chapter of the ACLU or any other similar name.

Student chapters can raise funds for the chapter by soliciting memberships to the ACLU of IL. First the chapter must designate a three-digit code for itself. That information must then be forwarded to the affiliate Membership Director. For example, the student chapter at the University of Illinois at Springfield is coded "UIS." That three-digit code should then be written onto membership envelopes that are made available at all student chapter events. The chapter will be forwarded a check covering memberships to the ACLU of IL solicited by that chapter. For example if the ACLU of IL receives 5 membership envelopes from new members for the first year of their membership at \$20.00/ per membership, all coded with the university's three digit code, that chapter will receive a check for \$100.00 from the ACLU of IL. Chapters may also take advantage of t-shirts as a recruiting tool . The ACLU of IL will refund the chapter fifteen dollars for every twenty dollar membership and the new member would receive an ACLU of IL t-shirt to boot! Please note that historically there has been confusion surrounding this policy. Individuals may join the ACLU via the IL or national websites or by returning solicitations to join from the ACLU of IL or the National ACLU office. Those new membership dollars will not be returned to student chapters since the solicitation was not from the student chapter via coded membership envelopes.

## ACTIVITIES for STUDENT CHAPTERS

Student groups generally engage in the following kinds of activities:

1. Public Education Events: Chapters are encouraged to sponsor speakers, forums, debates, film showings, and other events on timely civil liberties topics. Often it is advisable to co-sponsor such activities with other groups to improve publicity and turnout. Chapters also sponsor information tables to distribute ACLU literature and may submit articles to campus publications.
2. Issue Advocacy: Student groups serve to mobilize action at the school level for civil liberties campaigns in which the ACLU of IL is participating.

Activity Ideas:

**Hold a debate, panel discussion, roundtable discussion or speaker event on a current** civil liberties issue of interest to the club members and student body. The club members should identify which topics will be of greatest interest to their peers and ACLU staff can help identify appropriate speakers.

**Create a civil liberties film fest** where the student chapter sponsors the showing of a film with civil liberties themes once a month. For example: The History of the ACLU, Waco: The Rules of Engagement, To Kill a Mockingbird, Busted, Outfoxed, Unconstitutional.

**Celebrate Banned Books Week** by holding a reading or an event featuring books, music and films that have been censored or banned in public schools or libraries. Banned Books Week is the third week in September. The event can have a general approach or focus on censorship of a particular group like African American writers or gay and lesbian literature. For more information see [www.aclu.org](http://www.aclu.org) or [www.ala.org](http://www.ala.org)

**Volunteer to present a Rights and Responsibilities Forum at a local high school.** This type of activity has been successfully done by the U. of I. Champaign undergrad chapter and by the undergrad chapter at the University of Chicago. This type of forum may work best with a panel –(i.e. police officer, defense attorney and student representative) and in conjunction with a showing of the film, “Busted.”

**Work with other groups to register students to vote**

**Celebrate the Anniversary of Roe v. Wade (January 22), Women’s History Month, Black History month (February), National Coming Out Day (October 11<sup>th</sup>), or Gay Awareness Month (March).**

**Use other historic dates to talk about issues: for example, the anniversary of the signing of the USA Patriot Act (October 26)** to explore civil liberties in the age of terrorism. (the film, “Unconstitutional” an exploration of the ramifications of the USA Patriot Act may complement such an event).

**In the Fall have a speaker discuss the key cases handed down by the U.S. Supreme Court last term and the docket before the Court that Fall.**

**Lobby – have a letter-writing session.** Plan a presentation on a particular issue of concern in Illinois and then have a letter-writing session. The ACLU of IL often has campaigns around bills pending in the state legislature (which meets every January – May) and again in November for a brief six-day veto session). Students could help by writing their elected officials in favor of, for example, the Human Rights Act (legislation to prohibit discrimination in employment, housing, public accommodations and credit transactions on the basis of sexual orientation), against proposed constitutional amendments to ban gay marriage and against legislation to limit a woman’s right to choose, to name a few. Subscribe via the affiliate website, [www.aclu-il.org](http://www.aclu-il.org) to receive

Illinois legislative action alerts and via the national website at [www.aclu.org](http://www.aclu.org) to receive federal action alerts.

**Distribute information.** Find an excuse to have a day when students distribute information about student rights, police practices or other civil liberties issues to the school community. We have “Know Your Rights” brochures available in the Chicago office.

**Volunteer.** The ACLU of Illinois is always in need of volunteers for a variety of annual events: Halsted Street Days, the Bill of Rights Celebration (the ACLU of Illinois’ main annual fundraiser), and Chicago’s Gay Pride Parade.. In addition the Chicago office often has need for extra help with a broad range of tasks. Questions about volunteering should be forwarded to K.T. Sullivan, Associate Director at [ktsullivan@aclu-il.org](mailto:ktsullivan@aclu-il.org)