

## START WITH THE PAPERWORK

Once you decide to form a science policy and advocacy group, there are six things you will need to do in the first two months.

- a) **What rules apply?** Each University or institution has its own unique rules about how to start a group, especially in the case of student groups. There may be forms to fill out and you may even have to make a presentation to a department or school council. To locate this information, check with the main office of the graduate school or with the graduate student council.
- b) **Find a faculty advisor.** Even if University rules do not require it, it may be best to find a faculty advisor as soon as possible. Faculty advisors can help you navigate the bureaucracy and politics of your institution and offer ongoing advice. The ASCB may be able to help you identify potential advisors.
- c) **Come up with a name and a logo.** The groups' name should be something catchy that will be easy for people to remember and will quickly indicate what the group is about. The name should be unique and not sound like other groups on campus.

After you decide on a name, start thinking about a logo for the group. When designing your logo, here are three rules you should follow: 1) keep it simple 2) only use one font style and 3) don't use more than two colors. Make sure your logo is in compliance with any visual identity standards your institution may have.

- d) **Define the group's constitution.** It is critical to come up with some founding documents for the group. Check with your department of graduate program but a quick Google search will provide you with a wide range of sample constitutions for student organizations. As the group matures, you may find that you want to make changes but you should begin by answering some basic questions:
  - What is the purpose of the group?** This is its Mission Statement.
  - How many officers will run the organization?**
  - How do people become members of the group?**
  - How often will meetings take place?**
  - How will future officers be selected?**
- e) **Apply for a charter from your** University or institution. As with the rules connected with forming groups, your institution should have guidelines and standard forms for seeking a charter.
- f) **Look for sources of funding.** It is very likely that your University will have funding available to help run the group's operations. You can also look to organizations connected with your institution or even with life science industry in the area.

### **Alternative to Forming a University-sanctioned group**

Based on each institution's rules (especially regarding postdoctoral-led groups), it may be easier to be a subcommittee of a larger organization with a similar mission. For example, at the University of Kansas Medical Center, the science policy group is a subcommittee of the Biomedical Research Resource Association (BRRRA). The BRRRA seeks to provide professional development and educational resources to graduate students so a science policy subcommittee fits well within this organization.

Starting a policy group as a subcommittee may be easier and require less paperwork. Other advantages include being able to share financial resources and have access to a greater pool of members. This may be a good option for a smaller institution or one where student life is not as well developed. The disadvantage of this approach is limited visibility as a subcommittee being a part of a larger organization.



## HOW TO ATTRACT MEMBERS

Now that you have completed all the paperwork, it's time for you to find the people who will run the organization. Not to put too much pressure on you, but the decisions you make at this point will be critical to the starting success of the group and to its long-term stability.

- a) **Define the leadership positions.** As you were assembling the paperwork, you should have outlined some of the leadership positions for the group. It is advisable to take a harder look at the leadership slots beyond those that may be required. Along with the senior positions of President, Vice President and Social Media chair, think about using the leadership slots to build institutional memory and train the next group of leaders.

Consider a position such as Past President, to allow the previous president to transfer their knowledge to their successor. The position of President-elect or Vice President may provide an opportunity for the future president to gain experience and confidence leading the group.

While you may find the need to create Treasurer and Secretary positions, you may also want to consider other leadership posts to allow more people to become involved. These additional posts also serve as a training ground for future senior leaders.

- b) **Define the leadership roles.** It is important to have clear job descriptions for each position. As time progresses, you may find the need to assign new duties to various positions but it is critical that everyone know their role.
- c) **Create and Maintain Position Folders.** Make it a requirement of every officer to maintain a folder listing all of their responsibilities and duties performed during their time in office. These folders will allow the next person in the position to fully understand what has been done in the past, what worked and what did not work, and when planning for particular events should begin.
- d) **Practice.** One of the quickest ways to drive away initial members from joining the group is for the leadership to be disorganized during the first few meetings. Don't be afraid to practice running a meeting. This will allow you to get used to taking minutes, making presentations, and planning events.

Once the executive committee is formed, they should hold regular meetings to discuss the group's progress and decide what else needs to be done to manage the group.

### IT'S TIME TO SPREAD THE WORD

You've filled out the paperwork and selected your leaders. Now it's time to let everyone know you exist.

- a) **Social Media** – you should create a Facebook page, a Twitter handle, Instagram account, Snapchat handle and other social media accounts that are popular in your institution. Be sure to familiarize your members with any social media policies your institution may have.
- b) **Create an email account** with the group's name.
- c) **Don't forget word of mouth.** Friends recruiting friends is often the best way to gain members.

### It's All About The Connections

It is also important to make key connections on campus and in the larger research community.

- a) **ASCB** – The members and staff of the ASCB Public Policy Committee are invaluable contacts and resources. You should reach out to them for advice and ongoing information.
- b) **Chairs and Deans** - Make sure to let the chair of your department and the Dean of the graduate school know your plans. They can provide you with support, connections, and valuable advice.
- c) **Don't forget the professionals** – The members of your institution's government affairs office and public information office can also be very helpful to you. The government affairs staff has connections with government officials and the public information staff may want to help publicize your group and its activities.
- d) **Reach Out to Other Groups** – You're not in this alone. There are groups all over the United States like yours. Look in the Resources section of this webpage for a list of other science policy groups.

### Now It's Time for a Party

Now it's time for your Announcement Party. Make sure it's fun but don't forget the goals of the event: letting everyone know about you, recruiting members, and starting your work.

What makes a good party?

- a) **You Need a Hook.** Events with food and drink are great ways to attract a crowd. As an announcement party, consider having a happy hour with a brief presentation soon after the start.
- b) **Don't Forget to Advertise** – Make advertisements short and sweet and follow the 5 W's (Who, What, When Where, and Why). You should post flyers around campus, and in departmental buildings, in labs, and even try creative advertising like chalk on sidewalks.

- c) **The goals** of the party are to explain who you are, what you intend to do, and start signing up members. Be sure to follow up a few days later, thanking those at the party for attending.
- d) **Take Names** – Make sure you collect the names of everyone who attends the party so you can contact them later. Don't forget to let them know how they can contact you too.
- e) **Meet Everyone** – Everyone in attendance should meet at least one member of the group's leadership. Personal connections will make the difference.

## NOW WHAT DO YOU DO?

The paperwork is completed, the officers selected, and you are starting to gain members. Now the fun begins. In order to have an active group with lots of members, you will need to do two things: have regular, formal meetings and have policy-related events.

- a) **Regular general meetings** – the timing of these meetings should be outlined in the group’s constitution but make sure you hold them as required. It is advisable to have at least one general membership meeting each semester. Use these meetings to attract new members, inform current members about the group’s ongoing activities, and plan future events. Make sure to advertise the meeting in advance.
- b) **Policy-related events** – The policy activities are really the bread and butter activities of your group. They should be focused around teaching your members how to be good science policy advocates and then sponsoring science policy activities. Don’t try to make the events too amazing. It’s okay to start small.
  - **Your Science in Two Minutes** – in order to be an effective science policy advocate, scientists need to be able to explain their work concisely and in way non-scientists can understand. An interactive session that allows members to practice their two minute speech would be an invaluable session to hold.
  - **Sponsor Letter / E-mail campaigns** – a vital part of science policy and advocacy is letting your elected officials know how you feel about critical science-related issues. Your group can serve as a catalyst for all members of your institution to speak out on a science policy issue. While citizens should feel free to communicate with their elected officials on a wide range of issues, it is advisable that letter / email campaigns sponsored by your group be limited to topics of direct concern to science. In 2014, the Emory Science Advocacy Network (EScAN) at Emory University sponsored just such an event and it was a huge success. (To read more about their efforts, go to <http://www.ascb.org/write-with-a-pen-in-the-fight-for-science-funding/>)
  - **Host a Speaker** – Senators, Members of Congress, Congressional staff, or other policy professionals make great guest speakers. You should also invite them to tour labs and see research firsthand and hear how science funding is used from students and postdoc. Makes sure to always coordinate with your institution’s public information and government relations offices.
  - **Attend national Capitol Hill days** – The ASCB and many other professional scientific societies sponsor trips to Capitol Hill for meetings with your Congressional representatives. You can inform your membership about how to apply and may want to consider providing small travel awards. To sign up for Coalition for the Life Sciences-sponsored Capitol Hill Days, go to <http://www.coalitionforlifesciences.org/be-an-advocate/capitol-hill-days>.

- Understanding Federal Government -- It may be useful to hold a few informational sessions to inform members about how the federal government operates. Topics can include how the federal appropriations process works, how a bill becomes a law, etc. Being knowledgeable about these topics will help members understand policy and speak and/or write about policy issues more effectively.
- **Involvement in elections** – Involvement in science policy can easily lead to involvement in politics and elections.

While important, you should think carefully before taking this step. Keep these facts in mind as you decide:

- Support for science is not a partisan issue. For example, support for the NIH has historically increased under Republican leadership.
- Not all scientists, and members of your group, are of the same political party.
- Your institution's policies, especially if you receive funding, may place limitations on involvement in partisan activities.

One solution may be to communicate with all candidates, sharing your views and offering speaking opportunities equally.

#### c) **Stay Informed**

Keeping up to date on the latest policy activities in Washington will be important to the long-term success of the group. Some of the best ways to monitor what Washington is up to when it comes to science policy are:

- The Public Policy Briefing section of the monthly ASCB Newsletter
- The weekly ASCB Public Policy Update (<http://ascb.org/ascb-weekly-policy-updates-signup/>), which comes out every Friday afternoon.
- The Coalition for the Life Sciences (CLS), a group the ASCB co-founded and still belongs to, operates a free grassroots advocacy program called the Congressional Liaison Committee (CLS). You can join the CLS at <http://www.coalitionforlifesciences.org/be-an-advocate/cls-grassroots-advocacy>.