

How to Start a Movement

Student movements have historically brought about revolutionary change. During these movements, youth have been actively engaged in their communities, calling for social change.

This document presents some steps to build a student-led movement on your campus. Around the world today, young people are playing key leadership roles as planners, researchers, teachers, organizers, and advocates in the environmental movement, anti-violence campaigns, the anti-drug, and social justice organizations.

Youth activism has been a social phenomenon in the United States since the mid- to late 19th century when young people formed labor strikes in response to their working conditions, wages, and hours. Child laborers in the coal mines of Appalachia began this trend and the newspaper carriers soon followed. Newspapers, by covering these strikes, increased awareness and focused outrage against child labor, thus causing a movement to grow. The advocacy movement against child labor continued through the 1930s, when the American Youth Congress presented a “Bill of Youth Rights” to the U.S. Congress that addressed the most pressing, core issues affecting youth. Their actions were indicative of a growing student movement present throughout the United States from the 1920s through the early 1940s to advocate for youth rights. The 1950s saw the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. bring young people into larger movements for civil rights, especially related to African Americans. This led to the outbreak of youth activism in the 1960s and focused on issues such as free speech and the Vietnam War.

With the dawn of the 21st century, the world desperately needs a student-led movement to help stop the ravages of the AIDS pandemic and other injustices. The world needs a movement of young people who are motivated by their faith in God, and spurred on by an interest in bringing this hope to others by fighting injustice. By educating yourself and others on the impact of AIDS on families and entire communities, you can be a voice for change and rally the church to its original mission—to care for orphans and widows.

Here are some steps to take:

1. Envision the Future. AIDS is a global pandemic that is not likely to disappear anytime soon. Therefore, any response needs to be substantial and sustainable. Set both long-term and short-term goals for what your chapter wants to accomplish on your campus and in the hearts of students. As you set your goals, imagine what you want your campus to look like in five years. How can global AIDS activism be incorporated into the campus DNA, changing the very fiber of its approach to academics, student life and spirituality? How will students be equipped to recognize and respond to the world's greatest challenges after graduation? Envision the ideal future now so that you can begin building a legacy today.

2. Set the Foundation. After setting your long-term goals, establish what your chapter wants to accomplish within the next year. This year will be the foundation for your campus' sustainable response to the global AIDS pandemic. As you begin determining the year's goals for the campus, consider acting in the following ways:



Create awareness :: through viral campaigns that will spread knowledge to others.

Take action to help those affected by AIDS :: through advocacy, fundraising, and church and community engagement.

Promote discipleship :: through training and relationships to encourage ownership.

Develop commitment :: encourage a lifelong commitment to activism.

Influence government leaders :: through petitions, letter-writing, and other political advocacy actions.

These components and others will help guide your strategy forward.

3. Determine Your Course of Action. Begin to investigate activities that can help your chapter meet its goals. Learn from best practices that previous chapters have developed. You can get ideas through the Acting on AIDS toolkit, Web site, or from other chapters. Begin thinking of new ideas and strategies that fit your specific campus culture. Different campuses will have different levels of basic awareness, passions about other global issues, and ideas concerning ways to get involved.

4. Set Dates. Once you have identified the activities you want to do, schedule a time to do them. Be mindful of your campus events calendar and consider which traditional campus events your chapter might be able to complement and which would be best to avoid. The important thing is to commit to dates, register them with the necessary people on campus, and establish a timetable to follow through.

5. Manage Responsibilities and Tasks. Think through the steps to make your activities a success and begin dividing responsibilities accordingly. Set timelines for key milestones to be accomplished and hold each other accountable to finish the tasks. Be sure to meet regularly throughout this process so you can encourage one another along the way.

6. Evaluate the Results and Do It Again. After you have executed your activity, be sure to document and evaluate it. This will allow you to learn key lessons of what worked and didn't work, share your results with other chapters, and keep a record for subsequent chapter leaders. These results will also help you plan how to continue engaging your campus, churches, and community in pursuit of your long-term goals.

7. Bring Others on Board. Part of building a movement is building a large constituency of supporters as well as alliances with other groups. These can include campus organizations, churches or community organizations. Campus faculty and staff may also be aware of other individuals or groups with whom you can work. Staying connected to the national Acting on AIDS network is also a strategic way to multiply your sphere of influence.