How to Become an Effective Advocate as a High Schooler

A comprehensive, helpful, and enriching starters guide

Introduction

The following information is a comprehensive starter guide detailing how high schoolers can lead advocacy opportunities in their community. This guide will go over creating fundraisers, community events, and school clubs. Accompanying this guide, many links are supplied that lead to helpful documents and worksheets created for the purpose of aiding high schoolers in their advocacy journey. This guide will be geared towards advocacy in relation to American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network events, but it can be applied to any advocacy based organizations. This guide was created in partnership between the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, an organization aligned with the American Cancer Society focused on lobbying for legislation that will help eliminate cancer, and DiscussMed, an organization aimed at making medical knowledge more accessible and appealing as a way to increase youth advocacy.

Fundraisers

The American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network relies upon raising funds in order to further its mission in advocacy. A great way for you to make a large impact in the fight against cancer is by organizing a group to join an ACS CAN fundraiser or by creating your own. In the following information, you will learn exactly how to take initiative in starting or organizing a fundraiser.

- **How Do I Get Started?**
    - Getting started is often intimidating and overwhelming and the hardest part. In getting started, you must first address what you are trying to do. You may want to create your own fundraiser which is best if you feel that the current ACS CAN fundraisers are not for you and if you have a unique and realistic idea in mind. If you want to start your own fundraiser, go to the next section to get more information. If you want to learn about or join an ongoing ACS CAN fundraiser, find the section title 'Major ACS CAN fundraisers.'

- **Starting Your Own Fundraiser**
    - Starting your own fundraiser for ACS CAN is best when you have a unique idea that is distinct from the fundraisers already being done by

ACS CAN. Starting your own fundraiser from scratch can be difficult and intimidating, and it requires having a well thought out plan and idea. If you have something in mind that you eagerly want to sell or do, then this is the route for you. To begin planning, [here](#) is a great resource for you.

- **Major ACS CAN Fundraisers**
  - The largest ACS CAN fundraiser is the Lights of Hope. This fundraiser is dedicated towards honoring those who lost their life to cancer. The fundraiser works by having people raise money and every person who donates at least $10, can decorate a paper bag that will be in honor of someone whose life was touched by cancer. In a non-COVID year, these bags would be lit up at night in Washington D.C. and serve as a reminder to Congress of the long reaching effects of cancer and the magnitude of its impact on society. This year, ACS CAN has the nationwide goal of raising $750,000 with the Lights of Hope fundraiser. To learn more about this amazing fundraiser go [here](#). You can start your own page for the Lights of Hope and organize your own fundraiser. To learn how to start your page, go [here](#). From there, reach out to family and friends to raise money.

- With the declining funding for cancer research, ACS CAN has taken to fighting against this and to lobby for greater monetary allocations to such a cause. Therefore, ACS CAN set up a fundraiser where funds will be used to help send thousands of petitions advocating for greater cancer research funding, lobby and education officials about the importance of cancer research funding, and send action alerts letting officials know of the importance of supporting cancer related legislation. You can also create your own donation page for this fundraiser. From there, reach out to people you know to begin raising money. To support this important cause or start your own donation page, go [here](#).

- **Common Issues**
  - *Where do I start?* One of the hardest things to do when creating your own initiative is getting started. It often feels very overwhelming and intimidating. It is normal to not know where to start and feel tempted to give up; however, through methodical thinking and planning, creating your own fundraiser is a very doable task. The first thing to do is plan out what you want from your fundraiser and what type of fundraiser you will be having. As referenced earlier, [this sheet](#) is very

helpful for planning out your fundraiser. Once you have a concrete plan of what you want to do, bring your plan to fruition one step at a time.

- *How do I get people to donate?* When running a fundraiser, it is common to have doubts about the success you will see and worry that people will not donate. To get donations, it is all about beginning to pick up pace and then the rhythm should continue as once people see that you are starting to get donations, more and more people will begin to donate. To begin getting donations, you should reach out to family and friends to tell them about your fundraiser. You can reach out to them via email, messaging, and/or social media. It is important when reaching out to family and friends that you are polite and respectful but also clear and concise. [Here](#) is a template that you can use.

- *How do I get a venue?* While we highly recommend doing a virtual fundraiser to reduce the possible additional logistical costs and extra planning needed, it is quite often that the fundraiser requires an in-person venue. It must be noted that while in-person fundraisers may seem more personal and enjoyable, it is more restrictive as only

people nearby can come, and it can lead to other issues such as possible weather disturbances. If you still decide to do an in-person fundraiser, getting a venue may seem like a challenging task. If your fundraiser is outside, you should reach out to a local park or any nearby location with a big outdoor space. If your fundraiser is inside, you may consider utilizing a community center or someone's house. To reach out to request the use of a specific venue, here is a possible template that you could use.

School Clubs

An accessible way for high schoolers to make an impact in their community and organize events for charities and organizations such as ACS CAN is through creating school clubs. To that end, this guide will detail all necessary steps and provide extra tips to effectively create and organize a school club devoted to advocacy.

- **What Does an ACS CAN School Club Look Like?**
  - When creating a school club, it is important to have an idea on what the structure will look like. [Here](#) is a document that will go over a sample club format. This is only one of many ways to run a school club of this nature, but it is our recommendation on an effective way of doing so. No matter how the club functions, it should focus on making an impact in your community by creating and organizing events.

- **How Do I Get Started?**
  - Getting started is challenging for many reasons. To make it as easy as possible, we recommend thinking sequentially, do one thing at a time.

The first task is understanding what you want to get out of a club like this. We recommend reading the previous section to understand what an ACS CAN or any advocacy club should look like. Once you have a concrete vision, it is important to gauge interest, find an advisor, and then petition the school. To gauge interest, [here](#) is a helpful form. To find an advisor, we recommend speaking directly to a faculty member in which you know and who is active in their community. A science teacher is probably preferable, but any teacher who is involved in and committed to advocacy will work. Once you have clearly demonstrated interest and an advisor, [here](#) is a form to help you get all your ideas clearly laid out, so when you go to the school administrators asking for this club idea, you can make a convincing argument.

- Once your club gets approved by the school, the next steps are to select an executive board, run an interest meeting, and then begin. To select an executive board, interviews, elections, or applications are all recommended methods. First you should run an interest meeting to understand the number of people actually interested in participating in

the club as people may sign the petition yet not actually attend the club meetings. During the interest meeting, we recommend showing a presentation walking through the basics of the clubs. [Here](#) is a possible presentation format that you can use. Once you have run an interest meeting, you should focus on creating an executive board. An executive board is crucial to provide organization and to take the weight off of your shoulders as you will have help in recruiting for and running the club, so we recommend getting an executive board as soon as possible. After you have gotten school approval, advertised the club, found an advisor, organized an interest meeting, and created an executive board, you are ready to have your first meeting. For your first meeting, and any meeting after that, [here](#) is a worksheet to help you thoroughly organize how your meeting will run.

- **Common Issues**

    - *How do I get school approval?* Getting school approval is, for most people, a long and annoying process. Clubs often require finding an advisor, showing there is an interest and need, convincing a school administrator, getting school board approval, and then, finally, running

the club. This is, like most things discussed in this guide, an overwhelming and difficult process, but the resources created here should be very helpful. When trying to appeal to your school administrator or school board, remember to show passion. By showing your passion and love for what you are doing and the goal of such a club, it will provide a very convincing argument as to why your club should be created. The number one reason school administrators are often hesitant to support the creation of the club as they feel the student trying to create the club is doing it for all the wrong reasons. They worry they are only doing it for their resume, and then once the club is created, the student will abandon it. If you show your passion and that you are serious about the club and its potential, your idea will be much more appealing to school administrators and the school board. If after using the resources attached here, showing the great interest from your peers, demonstrating your passion, and finding an advisor, and your school administrators or school board still are not willing to move forward with creating your club, we recommend trying to create a community event or fundraiser. While those can

seem tougher as you do not have the support and resources of your

school, with the help of this guide, it is a very manageable process.

- *How do I get members?* Getting interest in your club to be

demonstrated is essential in the process of creating a club. If there is

no interest, then there is really little point to creating a school club.

From our experiences, people are often excited and enthusiastic about

a club that is for a very noble cause such as the one discussed here, so

if you clearly and concisely explain the purpose and goal of your club,

it should appeal to many people. We recommend getting at least 30

people to show their interest before going to the school board or

administration. If you are having trouble, remember to appeal to

people directly by reaching out through social media, in-person, and

messaging. If people feel they are personally wanted, they are much

more tempted to take part in such a club.

Community Events

ACS CAN is built on advocacy and showing legislators our solidarity behind the goal of eliminating cancer. Community events are a vague classification of any activities that are intended to bring the community together for the purpose of spreading awareness about the cause of ACS CAN.

- **Why Create This?**

  - Events such as these give you a lot of flexibility and leeway in creating something that you are passionate about. At the end of the day, you should be volunteering for ACS CAN as you are passionate about the cause and driven to help eliminate cancer. Creating a community event enables your passion to run free as you can choose any topic you would like and address it in how you feel is right. Common examples of community events can be found here.

- **How Do I Get Started?**

  - To get started in creating a community event, you must address the question of what you are trying to do. Community events are a vague classification ranging from a community leadership board to a pen pal

program. A community event can be any sort of organized activity meant at spreading awareness. With that, understanding what you hope to achieve will help give you a good idea about the event you hope to create. [Here](#) is a list of possible topics for what you can hope to achieve. Once you have a goal or problem you aim to address, you can start brainstorming ideas on how to address that very issue. [Here](#) is a sheet to help you in your quest to create an event or activity around the issue you feel passionate about.

- **Common Issues**

  - *How do I effectively advertise this event?* Any successful community based event needs people to participate. After using the worksheet to organize your ideas, you will have identified your intended audience and ways to appeal to them. When advertising, you should keep the ways to appeal to them in mind. For example, if you are appealing to students, advertising the fact that there are community service hours available for attending the event will tempt many of them into coming. To advertise, we recommend using email, messaging, and social media to reach out to family and friends to let them know about your event. Then, you can also create flyers and reach out to your

local newspaper as a way to get the word around town. Additionally, hang up posters and make announcements in your school. When creating an event, usually the more people the better. By utilizing all forms of communication, both virtual and physical, the news about your event should easily circulate around town. Remember, do not feel hesitant or worried about advertising, do not overthink it. Reach out to people using all means available and appeal to them in any way you know how to.

- *How do I get other parties involved?* If you are running an event such as a pen pal program with cancer patients, a panel with legislators, or anything of the sort, it requires reaching out to other groups, not just people in your community. Getting other parties involved often stands in the way of creating a very fulfilling and amazing event, but it should not be the thing that stands in the way. Oftentimes, high schoolers often psych themselves into overthinking this process and assume that other parties will never agree to join their event. However, in reality, these other parties are usually very eager and welcoming to such events. Therefore, we recommend not

overthinking the process and just go ahead and reach out to these parties. The first thing you have to do is determine what is the other party that you want involved. Once you have determined the group you want involved, you can start reaching out to them to get them to join your event. [Here](#) is an email format that we recommend trying to use. Email is a very formal and efficient means to reach out. It is often quite effective. If you do not get a response within a week, we recommend reaching out again. Once the other party has agreed to get involved, you should let them know all the minute details about your event. You must inform the other party about every little aspect of your event to ensure that they are on-board with it. Note that prior to reaching out to any group, you must be sure about the event you are running and their role in it.