

Loud & Proud Youth Organizer's Toolkit

Standard Version

Your Guide to Finding Your Voice, Building
Your Base, and Maximizing Your Impact

A Publication of the United States
Youth Forum (USYF)

Table of Contents

01	Introduction	01
	• Why We Created This Guide	01
	• Who Is This For	01
	• How to Use This Guide	01
<hr/>		
02	Finding Your Direction	02
	• It Starts With You	02
	• Find Your Focus	02
<hr/>		
03	Building Your Base	03
	• Start By Reaching Out	03
	• Create Your Team	03
	• Build an Inclusive Space	03
<hr/>		
04	Planning	04
	• Start with a Goal	04
	• Choose Your Action	05
	• Build a Timeline	05
<hr/>		
05	Funding	06
	• Where to Find Support	06
	• How to Fundraise	06
	• Grants for Youth Organizers	07
<hr/>		
06	Outreach & Mobilization	08
	• Digital Outreach (Making the Internet Work for You)	08
	• Craft a Spiel	09
	• Physical Outreach (IRL Still Matters)	09
<hr/>		

07	Engaging with Institutions	10
	• Why This is Different	10
	• Handling Conversations	10
	• Coalition Building	11
	• Working with Local Media	11
<hr/>		
08	Knowing Your Rights	12
	• The Basics	12
	• Legal disclaimer	12
<hr/>		
09	Sustaining Your Cause	13
	• Avoiding Burnout	13
	• Reflecting & Celebrating	13
	• Next Steps	13
<hr/>		
10	Staying Connected with USYF	14
	• Stay Connected	14
	• Submit Your Story	14
	• Get Involved with USYF	14
<hr/>		
11	Templates & Resources	15
	• State-by-State Resource Guide	15
	• Letter to a Legislator Template	15
	• Press Release Template	15
	• Team Role Assignments	15
	• Social Media Content Planner	15
	• Event Planning Timeline	15
<hr/>		

1. Introduction



Why We Created This Guide:

We believe that organizing is one of the most powerful tools we have for creating lasting, meaningful change. From student walkouts protesting educational inequality, to movements advocating for safer schools, to digital campaigns calling for legislative change - young people have always been on the front lines of progress.

At the United States Youth Forum (USYF), we recognize that passion creates movements. Our team believes that young people deserve tools, knowledge, resources, and support to turn their vision into action. That's why we created this guide. To help young organizers like you find your voice, rally your people, and make an impact in places that matter most to you.

Who Is This For:

This guide is for you, a young person who wants to enact change. You could be just beginning your journey into activism, or already knee-deep in a cause and looking for a little extra guidance. Maybe you've got big ideas but don't know where to begin. Or maybe you're stuck, and you're looking for ways to grow, fund, and keep momentum. Wherever you're at, this guide is designed to support you.

How to Use This Guide:

Think of this guide as your go-to roadmap. You don't have to read it all at once – each section is designed to stand on its own, so you can jump to the parts that matter most to you. Whether you're looking for fundraising tips, how to protest safely, or advice on meeting school officials, it's all here. We've also included examples, resources, and templates you can build from.

2. Finding Your Direction

*Feeling fired up but you don't know where to start?
You're not alone.*

Every powerful movement begins with someone noticing a problem and deciding, "This can't wait." Whether you're passionate about climate justice, gun reform, LGBTQIAA+ rights, internet safety, or something else entirely, the first step is to just start planning.

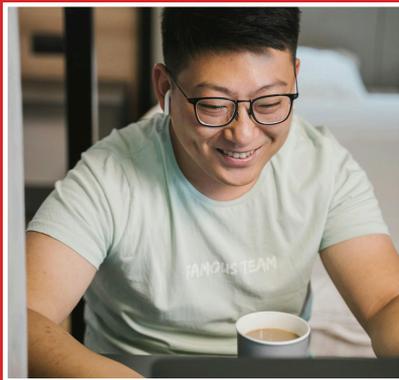
Start With You:

Ask yourself:

- What makes you angry, hopeful, or inspired?
- Is there something happening in your school, town, or state that doesn't sit right with you?
- Have you or people you care about been directly affected by an injustice?
- What's a change you wish you could see in your community right now?



Start small. Local issues are entry points. Change doesn't have to start in Washington D.C., it can start in your cafeteria, classrooms, city council, or even your group chat.



Find Your Focus:

Perhaps you are on the other end of the spectrum. Maybe you find yourself being pulled in many directions, toward many causes. While it can be a strength, trying to take on everything at once—especially when you're just getting started—can lead to burnout, feeling stuck, or being spread too thin.

Focusing on one issue doesn't mean you are ignoring others—it means you're building a strong foundation that can support and expand to other causes over time. Social issues are deeply connected, and working on one can create ripple effects across others.

So, ask yourself:

- What seems relevant to your community?
- Which issue feels the most urgent or personal right now?
- Where do you feel like your voice or perspective could make the biggest impact?
- What is manageable at this moment with the resources that you have?

3. Building Your Base

No movement happens alone. Once you've found your direction and cause of focus, the next step is building a community of people who believe in the same cause.

Start By Reaching Out:

You don't need a massive following to begin organizing, just a few people who care. Look around you first:

- Who else has expressed frustration about the issue you care about?
- What clubs, classes, or groups are already talking about related issues?
- Do your friends and/or family share your passion?
- Are there social media groups you can recruit from?



Create Your Team:

As your base grows, it's important to build a core team with shared goals and clear communication. Here are some common, but key, roles:

- **Coordinator:** Schedules meetings, tracks goals, assigns tasks, monitors progress
- **Social Media Manager:** Handles social media, designs posts, facilitates outreach
- **Policy Lead:** Tracks legislation, gathers facts, and keeps group informed
- **Action Planner:** Plans logistics for rallies, ensures events run smoothly
- **Fundraising:** Manages donations, fundraising ideas, and grant applications

Even small teams need roles. Be intentional about your team's structure. Consider this:

- Set up regular check-ins.
- Find a system for managing projects/tasks between check-ins.
- Define roles but remain flexible.
- Encourage shared leadership – don't do everything by yourself.

Build an Inclusive Space:

The most powerful movements make space for everyone to be heard and valued.

That means:

- Prioritizing voices from impacted communities
- Making meetings and events accessible (physically, financially, and emotionally)
- Creating a culture where people feel safe asking questions, making mistakes, and expressing their thoughts, feelings, and concerns.
- Respecting different communication styles and identities.



Inclusion is not a checkbox, it's a mindset.

Ask yourself: Who's not in the room? Whose voice is missing?

4. Planning

Now that you've found your focus and started building your team, it's time to turn these ideas into action. Whether you're organizing a school petition or launching a protest, thoughtful planning strengthens your impact.



Start with a Goal:

Ask yourself and your team:

- What specific change are we trying to make?
- Who has the power to make that change happen?
- What do we want people to do as a result of our actions?

Think SMART. Your goal(s) should be: specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and timely. Here are some examples:

- By the end of the year, we will collaborate with at least 1 veterans' advocacy group to draft a statement promoting legislative changes.
- We will collect 100 signatures for a petition to protect voting rights by the end of 6 months.
- At least once a year, we will organize a walkout to raise awareness about anti-LGBTQIAA+ legislation.
- Within 9 months, we will launch a storytelling project where at least 15 older adults share their personal experience with civic engagement and social change.



Choose Your Action:

There’s no single right way to raise awareness or demand change. Choose the strategy that best fits your goals, audience, and resources.

Here are a few options:

- Rallies or protests: Great for visibility, media attention, and a show of collective action.
- Sit-ins or walkouts: Disruptive actions that garner attention and pressure institutions.
- Petitions: A way to build support and show decision-makers that people care.
- Social media campaigns: Using platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and Bluesky to spread your message, educate others, and build your base.
- Teach-ins or workshops: Educate peers or community members on the issue and what they can do.
- Letters or calls to leaders: Direct advocacy that targets those in power, pressuring them to enact the change the community wants to see,
- Posters or art: Creative approaches that can build community, raise awareness, and gain visibility.



Build a Timeline:

Once you’ve chosen an action, plan backward from the date you want it to happen.

Start with the Action Day. What needs to happen by that date? Consider what sorts of tasks need to be completed a week before the event, two to four weeks before the event, and what is the first step that you and your team could take right now to begin?

This is where the Coordinator shines. They can monitor progress, assign tasks, and hold team members accountable to ensure deadlines are met in a timely manner.

5. Funding

You don't need a huge budget to make a difference, but some funding, if available, can help take your work to the next level. From printing flyers to booking space—or simply buying snacks for volunteers—funding gives your cause the fuel it needs to grow.

Where to Find Support:

Don't know where to find funding? Good news, there's support out there. You'd be surprised how many people want to support youth-led change.



Start with:

- Friends and family: Ask those around you to support your cause.
- Teachers and school staff: Some schools may have small budgets for student-led initiatives or can connect you with resources.
- Local businesses: Many local businesses are willing to donate some money, space, or supplies in exchange for a shoutout or thank you.
- Other youth organizers: Reach out to other youth-led groups in your area who may be able to refer you to resources or even collaborate in a fundraising campaign.
- Grants: Some of the major corporations like Target, Walmart, Meijer, etc. offer grants to youth organizations. These are typically given on an application-basis.

How to Fundraise:

There are lots of ways to raise money, and many don't require a professional fundraiser.

Here are a few ideas:

- Online fundraisers: Use platforms like GoFundMe, GiveButter, or Venmo/PayPal to raise money. Be clear about your cause and how funds will be used.
- Peer-to-peer: Ask members of your team to reach out to a designated number of people to donate or share the fundraiser.
- Social media challenges: Create a fun challenge or campaign that spreads your message and encourages donations or support.
- Merch sales: Sell handmade items, t-shirts, stickers, pins, etc. that reflect your movement's values or message.
- Events: Host a movie night, open mic, community dinner, talent show, etc. with a suggested donation or fundraising goal.

Disclaimer:

Please make sure all merch sales and event activities follow local laws and guidelines. If you are under the age of 18, work with a parent, guardian, or trusted adult to develop a plan to ensure your safety. Having a trusted adult present is recommended.

Pro-tip: Always share updates and thank your supporters!

Grants for Youth Organizers:

As mentioned earlier, many companies will offer grants to youth-led or grassroots efforts. These don't have to be intimidating, and some are simple to apply for.

Start by exploring youth-centered foundations. Here are some major ones to consider—but don't forget to look into local or regional organizations in your community as well:

- UNESCO Global Youth Grant Scheme
- Global Youth Mobilization
- Youth4Climate
- UN-Habitat Urban Youth Fund
- Youth Service America Grants
- Karma for Cara Foundation
- Peace First
- YouthBank

You can also focus your search based on the issue or cause you are addressing. Look for funding or grant opportunities tailored to particular focus areas.

Before applying:

- Be clear on what you need the money for. Foundations and companies offering grants want to know where their money is going and how it will be used. Include a specific breakdown of your budget.
- Show impact. What are you planning to do, who will benefit, and why does this matter?
- Get feedback from a mentor or, at the very least, someone willing to review the grant for clarity and areas of improvement.



6. Outreach & Mobilization

At this point, you have a cause, a team, and a plan. Now, it's time to mobilize. Get the word out, expand your reach, and inspire others to join you. Whether you are organizing a single event or building a long-term campaign, how you talk about your work and how you reach people will make all the difference.



Digital Outreach (Making the Internet Work for You):

These days, social media is one of your most powerful tools. It's free, it's fast, and it's where your audience is.

Tips by platform:

- Instagram: Great for storytelling, event graphics, infographics, and behind-the-scenes posts. Use Stories and Reels to stay visible and interactive.
- TikTok: Short form content with a strong hook can go far. Be authentic, show your team, speak directly to the camera, and use trends to explain your cause and reach your people.
- Email: Perfect for building long-term engagement. Use it for updating supporters, sharing calls to action, and recruiting. A weekly to monthly newsletter will help maintain connections made and show potential donors the work you are doing.
- Twitter/X: Useful for quick updates and connecting with journalists, other organizations, and community leaders.
- Group chats & Discord: Utilizing "private" or member-only spaces can help activate volunteers and inspire a sense of community amongst your following.

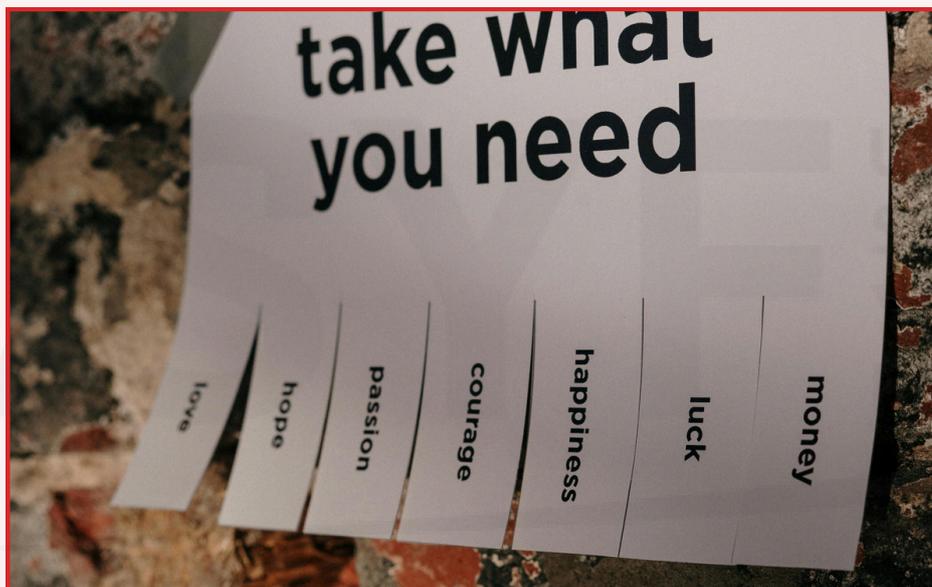
Also, use hashtags!

Craft a Spiel:

One question you'll get asked a lot is: "What is this about?" Having a concise but punchy spiel about your cause is key to making a lasting impression. Here's what to include:

- The problem: What inspired this cause?
- Why it matters: Who is affected and why does it matter?
- Your vision: What change are you fighting for and what is the end goal?
- The ask: What do you want people to do right now?

Pro-tip: Being upfront about your age and your passion for change is a powerful way to engage adults and get them interested in your cause. Youth action is moving, so use it to your advantage.



Physical Outreach (IRL Still Matters):

Yes, real world visibility still makes an impact. Especially locally.

Consider these methods:

- Flyers: Hang them in schools, libraries, coffee shops, rec centers, and community boards (Disclaimer: be cautious and courteous – an empty cork board is not always for community posting. Always ask before you pin!).
- Posters: Eye-catching visuals with bold text work best. And QR codes!
- Handouts: Useful for events, tabling, or canvassing. Keep it short and include a clear next step, such as following your social media or reaching out to a team member.
- Tabling at school or community events: A great way to engage with people face-to-face (Disclaimer: again, always ask! Usually tabling events will require signing up. It's typically not acceptable to show up and set up a table without having permission unless stated otherwise).

Again, always refer to school and community rules about posting, tabling, and other forms of physical outreach. While it may feel like a barrier, not following regulations will only hinder your cause in the long run. For your own safety, make you're in an open, public space, and be aware of who and what is around you. Have a plan in mind in case something goes awry. If you are under 18, we highly encourage you to develop a plan with your parent, guardian, or trusted adult to remain safe and avoid any issues with permission or local policies. Having a trusted adult present is recommended.

7. Engaging With Institutions

So far, you've been rallying your peers, community, and team. But when it comes to enacting lasting change, you'll likely need to engage with institutions. What are institutions? In this case, we are referring to bodies of power, such as schools, local government, school boards, the media, and policymakers. Think of any individuals or groups who are making decisions that impact the broader public.

Why This is Different:

Institutions often have power. They may be gatekeepers and enforce processes that impact people in some capacity. Engaging with institutions is different from working with individuals—it often involves navigating formal procedures, overcoming skepticism toward youth leadership, and maintaining a professional demeanor.

However, don't let this intimidate you. Young people deserve and belong to be in these spaces. Your voice is valid and needed.



Handling Conversations:

When you are trying to meet with a principal, for example, or a school board member, city council rep, or other decision-maker, remember:

- Do your homework: Know the person(s) role, background, and the power they wield. Don't expect a principal to be able to make the same level of change as a legislator.
- Come prepared: Be clear about what you are asking for, bring talking points, evidence, and examples of how this issue is impacting the community. Don't shy away from lived experiences. Personal stories are often powerful and moving.
- Be respectful but direct: You can be assertive and professional. Stay calm, even if you are feeling frustrated or dismissed. Be aware that you may not be taken seriously.
- Follow up: After the meeting, send an email or some form of communication that includes a recap, restates your ask, and thanks the person(s) for their time. Don't be afraid to follow up more than once, though be strategic. If you follow up too often, they may be less inclined to assist.

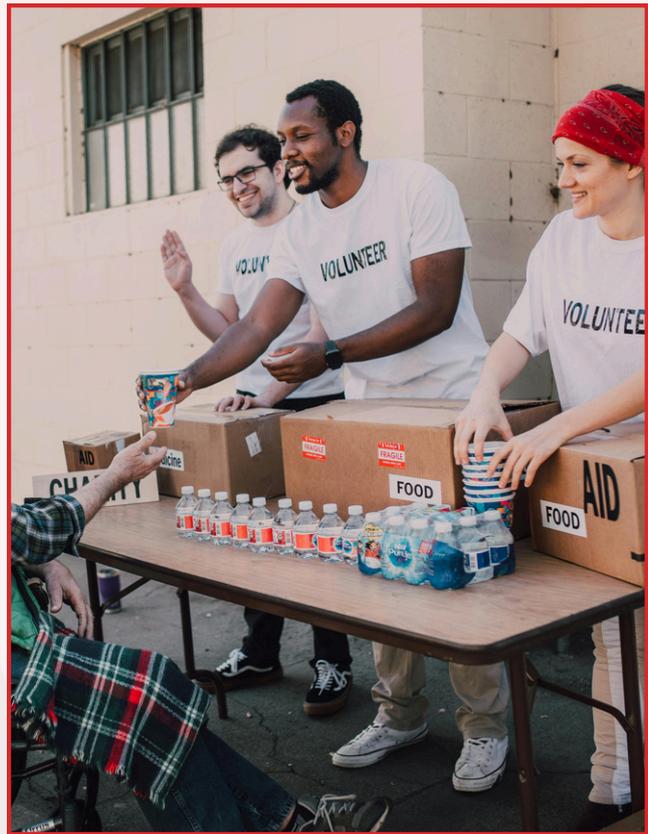
Coalition Building:

Recognize that you don't have to do this alone. In fact, collaborating with other organizations can broaden your impact.

Look for:

- Youth-led organizations in your area
- Student groups at local schools that align with your cause
- Community nonprofits

A united front is harder to ignore, and it expands your reach and resources. When you are building coalitions, be sure you are being clear about your goals, values, and expectations. Also, be sure to offer your support as well – uplift these local entities and celebrate each other's wins.

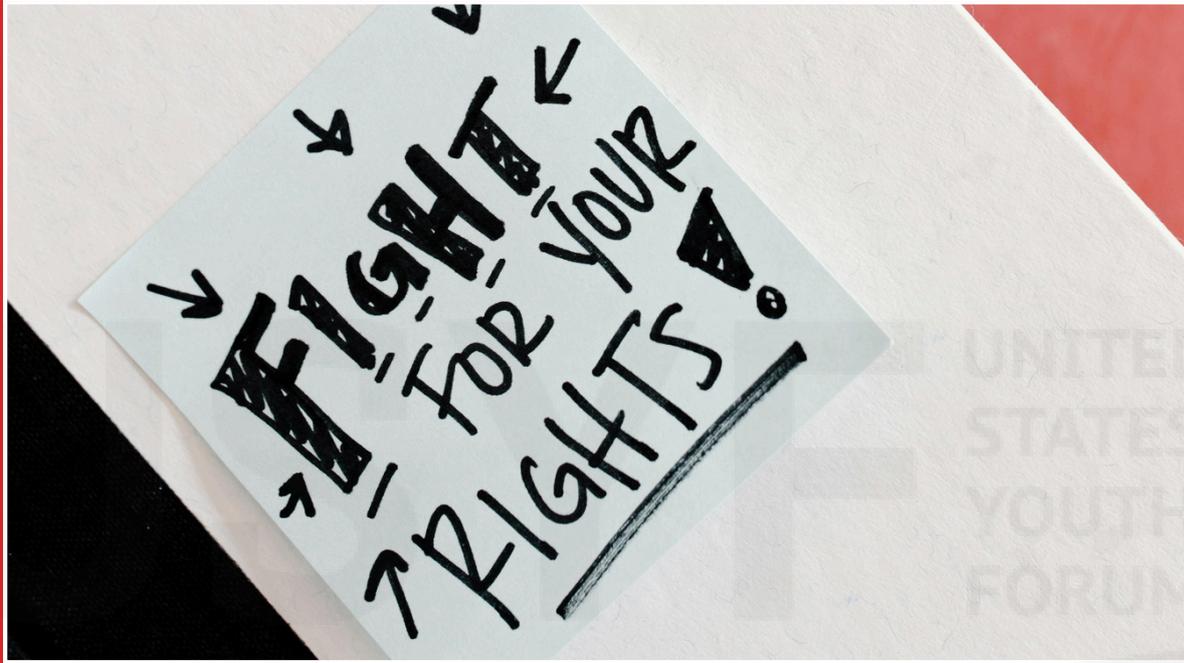


Working with Local Media:

This is not always feasible, but getting coverage from local news stations, newspapers, or even student publications can boost your visibility and help you reach more supporters. It can also be another avenue to pressure decision-makers. Here are some ideas:

- Draft a press release: Include the who, what, when, where, and why of your event or campaign.
- Email local reporters: Provide a short, compelling pitch (be on the lookout for reporters who may have covered similar issues or share similar interests).
- If the end goal is an in-person event, notifying the local media may entice them to report on it.

8. Knowing Your Rights



If you are engaging with institutions or planning a rally, it is important to have an idea of how to protect yourself, your team, and supporters. The right to protest and speak out is a Constitutional right, but how those rights are respected in practice can vary. It is important, as a young leader, to carefully consider the potential risks. We highly recommend researching and being aware of how local, state, and federal government agencies have been responding to movements in your area.

The Basics:

In most cases, the First Amendment protects your ability to:

- Peacefully protest in public spaces like sidewalks, parks, and government buildings.
- Carry signs and wear clothing with messaging.
- Hand out flyers and petitions.
- Record public officials (such as police) as long as you are not interfering.

However, your rights may be limited if:

- You are on private property (such as inside of a business).
- You are blocking off traffic without a permit.
- You are participating in an unpermitted march in certain cities or zones.

Always research local rules, regulations, and laws.

Legal Disclaimer:

This guide is for informational purposes only and is not a substitute for professional legal advice. Laws and policies may vary based on your city, state, or school district. The United States Youth Forum (USYF) is not responsible for any legal consequences that may result from participation in actions or protests.

9. Sustaining Your Cause

Organizing is hard work. Maybe you are facing barriers that you didn't expect, or you are feeling disheartened by a lack of engagement. Whatever it is, it's normal.

Avoiding Burnout:

Burnout happens when the stress of organizing begins to outweigh your energy and joy. It's real and it's common.

Here are some tips for managing burnout:

- Set realistic goals: If your goals are unattainable, you may be setting yourself up for disappointment. You can't fix everything overnight (even though we wish we could). Focus on progress, not perfection.
- Share the load: Use your team! If you are taking on too much or not offering the chance for other team members to contribute, not only will you be struggling, but your team members may feel undervalued. Lean on your team, rotate responsibilities, and delegate tasks.
- Take breaks: Rest is part of the resistance. Step away when you need to, and encourage other team members to do the same. Set up a protocol for what to do when someone is "out of office."
- Build a support system: Check in regularly with your teammates, and also connect with people outside of your team who can offer support and celebrate your wins.
- Protect your joy: Make space for the things that recharge you.

Reflecting & Celebrating:

After an action, campaign, or milestone, regardless of outcome, take time to pause and process.

- Debrief as a team: What went well, what could have been better, what did you learn, and how will you apply that to your next big move?
- Celebrate: Host a thank-you gathering with your team, post recaps on social media, and be proud of what you have done.
- Say thank you: Thank your volunteers, donors, partners – whoever contributed!



Next Steps:

Your work isn't over, and that's a good thing. Movements don't end with one rally or campaign. Think about what comes next:

- Can you grow your team?
- What gaps have you noticed?
- Should you launch another campaign or pivot your strategy?
- Is it time to rest, regroup, and plan?
- Do you have any insights that you could share with new youth organizers?



10. Staying Connected with USYF

This guide is just the beginning. Whether you are planning your first protest, starting a student organization, or building a long-term campaign, we're here to support you every step of the way.

Stay Connected:

The United States Youth Forum (USYF) is a youth-led, youth-powered movement dedicated to uplifting the voices of young people and empowering them to lead change.

Here's how you can stay connected:

- Join our mailing list: Want updates on new resources, events, and the work that we are doing at USYF? Sign up for our mailing list to stay in the loop and never miss a beat.
 - [Subscribe here](#)
- Follow us on social media: Follow, share, and tag us!
 - [Instagram](#)
 - [LinkedIn](#)
 - [Website](#)



Submit Your Story:

We'd love to hear from you. If you've used this guide to organize an event, build a team, or take action, share your story with us! Your voice could inspire others to get involved and lead change in their own communities. Please share any thoughts, feedback, what was helpful, and what wasn't using the link below!

[Reach out to us!](#)

Get Involved with USYF:

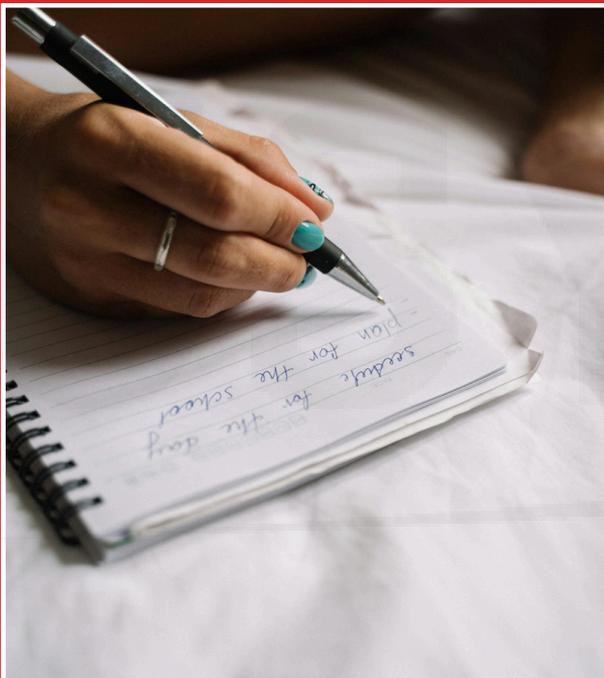
Looking to take activism even further? Consider volunteering with USYF! From social media to outreach to campaign organizing, there are many ways to plug in and grow your impact alongside a national network of youth leaders.

[Contact us!](#)



11. Templates & Resources

Think of this final section as your organizing toolkit, one that we hope will grow over time. We know that starting something new can feel overwhelming, which is why we've created templates and resources to help you take action faster, smarter, and with more confidence. Whether you're writing to a legislator, planning a protest, or drafting your first social media post, we've got your back. The downloadable PDFs of the below resources will be available on our website under "additional resources".



State-by-State Resource Guide:

Need to know what resources and local organizations are in your area? Check out our State-by-State Resource Guide that includes a list of youth-friendly organizations organized by state.

Letter to a Legislator Template:

Make your voice heard by writing to local or state officials. Our template walks you through what to say and how to format it.

Press Release Template:

Planning an event or campaign? Use this to get the media's attention.

Team Role Assignments:

Clarify who is doing what to avoid burnout and to manage tasks effectively.

Social Media Content Planner:

Organize your posts, pick themes, and plan your outreach for maximum impact.

Event Planning Timeline:

Use this simple checklist to plan backward from your event date and stay on track.

