

**Democratic Socialists of America**

# **Huron Valley**

**How-To Guide**



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# Welcome

We're glad you're here. Whether you're brand new to socialism or you're a long-term organizer, we welcome your ideas and your energy.

This how-to guide, which is adapted from DSA-SF's wonderful [how-to series](#), is meant to give you the tools you need to organize effectively in our chapter and community. In addition to information about reserving spaces and facilitating meetings, you'll find helpful advice about setting boundaries, avoiding burnout, and keeping yourself & other comrades safe. We also highly recommend DSA-SF's [tiny organizing guide](#).

A better world is possible!

# A short guide to setting boundaries

Being a good organizer & leader means knowing your own limits. Here are some strategies for setting boundaries. Consider working through this document in a group setting to promote accountability!

## **STEP 1: Become aware of your limits.**

Brainstorm and record the things that drive you crazy, make you tired, or cause resentment.

- What communication channels do you enjoy using? Are there any that you really hate?
- How long can you do an activity until you start to feel depleted or on edge?
- Which types of activity energize and deplete you: rallies, mutual-aid work, committee meetings, solo project time, online time, chapter meetings, etc?
- Which people tend to energize versus deplete you? (It's okay that this happens—we all connect with some people more than others!)
- Which types of projects energize and deplete you? Which roles? (For example: Event planning, making a zine, administrative duties, trying to gather a group of people together to work on a project).

## **STEP 2: Lay out the most important limits out of the ones you've discovered.**

Which limits, when crossed, make the biggest difference to your emotional state?

Examples:

- Using Signal more than every other day.
- Attempting to keep up with all the DSA emails you receive.
- Engaging in conversations that require a lot of your time and emotional energy, with specific people who think very differently than you do.
- Participating in more than three evening events per week.

## **STEP 3: Set and stick to your limits.**

Once you've laid out a few general limits, stick to them for a week or two. See if you feel a difference.

Remember that investing too much of your energy into one thing can really throw you off balance. If you set, stick to and maintain (and occasionally review) your boundaries, you'll be able to keep organizing without burning out for a long time to come. Your organizing will become sustainable.

# Reserving a meeting space

We recommend holding meetings in public, easy-to-find spaces. Our general rule is that they must be ADA compliant—we take accessibility seriously! Snacks & beverages are always a plus.

We have a few go-to spaces for our events, including:

- Journey of Faith | Contact: Susanna, [jofdisciples@gmail.com](mailto:jofdisciples@gmail.com)
  - Requires a code for entrance (ask the SC)
  - Parking available
- Riverside Arts Center | Contact: Marisa Dluge, [marisa@riversidearts.org](mailto:marisa@riversidearts.org)
  - Requires a key for entrance (confirm with Marisa)
  - Parking available
- Canterbury House | Contact: Lily Merritt, [lilymerr@umich.edu](mailto:lilymerr@umich.edu)
  - Requires a key for entrance (ask the SC)
  - Parking can be difficult to find
- Friends Meeting House | Contact: Pat, [aafmoffice@sbcglobal.net](mailto:aafmoffice@sbcglobal.net)
  - Not great for socials, as you can't eat or drink in the main space
  - \$20/hour to reserve

We're also big fans on meeting at one of the many public library branches in [Ann Arbor](#) & [Ypsi](#)!

A2: Small spaces (6-12 people) are available downtown, at the Westgate branch in west Ann Arbor, and the Mallett's Creek branch in southeast Ann Arbor, while a 30-person event space called the Freespace is an option downtown. Book at the [aadl.org Room Bookings page](#) (sign in required).

Ypsi: Two spaces (10-18 people) available at Michigan Ave branch and small spaces (4-8) available at Whittaker branch. One large room at Whittaker (50-80) but difficult to find available. Book at [ypsibrary.org page](#) (no sign in required)

No reservation needed (but no guarantees that there will be adequate space/a concurrent event in the space that makes it hard to hear everyone):

The Common Cup (AA)  
Cultivate (Ypsi)  
GO! Ice Cream (Ypsi)  
Uptown Coffeehouse (Howell)  
Zou Zou's (Chelsea)  
Alpha Coney Island (Jackson)

# Facilitating a meeting

Meetings are most successful when you plan them ahead of time and assign roles. Successful meetings tend to last around one hour and have a stated purpose—hence the agenda! Facilitators should pass on the details about all meetings to our social media coordinator, who will then add them to the online calendar and/or social media.

In general, we recommend that every meeting have a facilitator, notetaker, and stack-taker/timekeeper. Facilitators are most often committee chairs, though the chair may ask others to take on that responsibility.

**\*Whenever possible, make sure that each role is assigned to a different person. It is difficult to take notes *and* facilitate at the same time and do both well, just as it's difficult to focus on both note-taking *and* taking stack or taking stack *and* facilitating.**

Before the meeting, the **facilitator** should set a draft agenda and share it, via email group and/or Slack, with the members that they anticipate will attend. Once the agenda has been considered and approved (this sounds complicated, but you can just send people the agenda and ask if it looks good to them), the facilitator should share the final version and a reminder about the time and place of the meeting. If you want to make sure everything is on the agenda, you can always open the meeting by asking if anyone has anything to add to the agenda!

During the meeting, the **facilitator** will first solicit other facilitation roles (if not agreed upon beforehand), go over community agreements, and introduce the agenda. They will then move the group through the agenda, and lead any decision-making processes (votes, etc.). The **notetaker** will first record everyone in attendance at the meeting, then jot down brief summaries of major points and next steps (preferably in a existing agenda on google drive. The **stack-taker** will keep a running list of speakers and keep time.

After the meeting, the **notetaker** will post the notes to the email group and/or Slack, highlighting important points. The **facilitator** will schedule another meeting with input from the committee or group members.

# Preparing for a chapter meeting

**Keep in mind that the work of leading our organization is inherently collective. While the Steering Committee is responsible for making sure the below tasks are completed, delegation of work is an important aspect of leadership!**

## Two months before meeting:

- Set meeting date (Steering Committee)
- Reserve space (co-chairs)

## One month before meeting:

- Set next Steering Committee meeting (co-chairs)

## 2-3 weeks before meeting:

- Hold Steering Committee meeting to discuss potential chapter meeting (CM) agenda, facilitation roles, and rising matters
- Send out an initial email announcing date, time, and location of upcoming CM (co-chairs)
- Create CM event on social media (social media coordinator)

## 1-2 weeks before meeting:

- Confirm final CM agenda and roles (co-chairs)
- Email CM agenda and info to membership (co-chairs)
- Edit digital presentation for meeting, if necessary (co-chairs)

## Roles:

- **Pre-meeting supplies coordinator:** Brings all necessary printouts & supplies - can delegate responsibilities as needed
- **Food coordinator:** picks up food and beverage, brings paper plates & utensils (minister of fun) - can delegate responsibilities as needed
- **Audio/visual coordinator:** Brings and sets up projector and other A/V equipment as appropriate- can delegate responsibilities as needed
- **Greeters:** Welcomes members, provides way-finding, orients new members and interested guests
- **Attendance:** checks in members, helps with name tags, provides voting cards (membership coordinator)
- **Facilitators:** moves members through the agenda (co-chairs)
- **Timekeeper:** makes sure facilitators stick to schedule
- **Notetaker:** keeps detailed notes of all important matters (secretary)

# Running membership trainings

Internal education, especially for new members, is central to developing a healthy organizing culture.

## New Member Orientation

When preparing to lead a new member orientation, it's important to remember that you don't have to go over *everything*. Orientations are about talking to new members, seeing what they're interested in and what work they're already doing, and finding ways to plug them into our many existing projects. No one loves being talked at for an hour.

Here's a version of our [new member orientation training](#). Feel free to duplicate and edit as necessary.

## Organizing 101

The goal of our [Organizing 101](#) training is to get members thinking about how capitalist structures are at work in their everyday lives, and how we might come together in diverse coalitions to build democracy and disruptive, shared power. Building meaningful relationships is the core of our practice - they don't call us *socialists* for nothing!

# Leading internal organizing trainings

Taking on a leadership position can be daunting, but we're all in it together!

Being a leader means, in so many ways, being a good comrade—it should be part of everything we do. When we build, maintain, and deepen relationships with members, that's leadership development. When we work to help members get involved in committees and, eventually, leadership roles in those committees, that's leadership development. When we create opportunities for members to get involved in political work, that is leadership development. It might feel like invisible work, but we see it!

Here are some trainings to help us become better organizers:

[DSA No Shortcuts to Building Power](#)

[DSA Building Capacity & Developing Leaders Mini Training](#)

[DSA Member Mobilizer Mini Training](#)

Conflict resolution

[Build Power Mapping Training](#) (Password: build)

[Protest Rights, Risks, & Responsibilities Training](#)

[DSA National Design Committee](#)

[DSA FAQ](#)

[DSA Stacks](#)

# Running a canvass

Talking with people at their doors can be intimidating, but many people find it can actually be quite fun. Canvassing is one of the many tools socialists can use to spread our message, expand our base, and build the capacity of our members to act.

Preparation is the mark of a successful canvass. Make sure to write a script that includes some kind of ask. This can be a great opportunity to get new people involved or at-least to add someone to our email list, petition, or something of that kind.

It's also very important to know where and when you'll be canvassing. Each canvasser should be provided with a script and map of their turf. Additionally, they should have some way of capturing data from the canvass (i.e. which doors the canvasser knocked, how the convo went, etc.)

Make sure the purpose of the canvass is well defined and understood by the canvassers. Lastly, be sure to meet briefly as a group before the canvass to get everyone on the same page and debrief afterwards. Post-canvass is a great time to get to know comrades!

<https://dsausa.org>

# Presenting at an outside event

We're not always preaching to the choir! If you're interested in giving a formal presentation on HVDSA & the work we do at another organization, we ask that you first discuss it with our Steering Committee.

Once it's a go, you'll might want to customize [this presentation](#) so that it speaks to your potential audience. If you research your audience beforehand—you might even want to ask some of the people who might attend the events—you'll be able to anticipate their questions and make your points more worthwhile. Once you've put everything together, make sure to share the presentation with [huronvalleydsa@gmail.com](mailto:huronvalleydsa@gmail.com) so we have a copy on file.

Don't forget to bring our propaganda and [zines](#)! They're always a smash hit.

A note on tone: One of the great things about DSA is how welcoming we are to new leftists and people who are socialism-curious. Try to have a friendly tone. When you find yourself getting heated, take a break. Calling people names, yelling, or being angry is a turn-off not just to the person you're talking to, but anyone listening or reading. You run the risk of looking like a jerk.

There are things you can do to give yourself the best shot at a good faith conversation. Do something that the person you're talking to will never expect: apologize. Or say thank you. Or say when they make a fair point. It's a good way to signal that you're coming from an honest place, and you're willing to find common ground.

# Talking to the media

HVDSA co-chairs are **the chapter's "official" spokespeople**. That being said, if you attend an event, the press might put you on the spot. The best way to get used to talking to the media is by attending one of our media trainings. In the meanwhile, here are some pointers:

A. **Know your talking points and stick to them.** Review them before interviews. Say them as often as you can to increase the likelihood that it makes it into the story. Don't worry about being repetitive.

B. **You don't have to answer any question you don't want to.** You can use transitions to return things to your talking points. You've seen politicians do this—you can too! The reporter can't make you say anything you don't want to. In a similar vein, it's okay to say you don't know. Never make up anything when talking to the press.

C. **Speak clearly and concisely.** You want to speak in soundbites and quotes. That means you don't want to answer just "yes" or "no" because that's not very helpful for the reporter. You want to keep it short and crisp. Don't feel rushed or on the spot. It's okay to think about things.

D. **Know who you're talking to.** Think of who will watch or read the outlet of the particular journalist you will be speaking with—that is who you should be thinking of communicating with when talking to the journalist. At the same time, research the journalist too! This can also help you anticipate what kinds of questions you might get.

E. **Treat the press with professional respect.** They are not your buddies, so don't tell them things you wouldn't want to see printed (even \*off the record\*), but also don't get angry with them or be disrespectful either. They get the last word.

F. **Be authentic.** Be yourself when talking to the press! Practice these talking points and put them in your own words to make them feel natural to you. While generally we don't want to add things to talking points, it is okay to incorporate your own personal socialist story if you're comfortable sharing.

G. **Talk to the steering committee!** If something went really wonky in the interview or you're worried about something you said, just let us know. Likewise, if there was something you did that you thought worked really well and you want to pass it along with others, feel free to share!

# Talking to the media

**Remember:** don't answer the question you were asked, answer the question you *wished* you were asked.

In general, it's good to know our primary talking points. Here are a few we've agreed on at HVDSA:

*Democratic socialism is the belief that both the **economy and society should be run democratically.***

- We're the local chapter of the country's largest socialist organization.
- We want communities and workplaces that are designed to **meet public needs**, not to make profits.
- We are **not a political party**, we're activists and organizers.
- The work we do is the work our members want us to do. We are a **member-led** organization.
- You can consult the [DSA FAQ](#) for more information.
- For talking points about HVDSA, see this [one-pager](#).

# Doing meaningful outreach

Coalition building is at the core of what we do in DSA. Building organizational relationships is best done in collaboration with the elected Steering Committee of our Chapter. If you want our Chapter to work with another organization, ask the SC first. There is a good chance we already have a relationship! If not, leadership is always happy to help create strong bonds of solidarity with allied groups.

It's important to keep in mind that while the goals of our Chapter and those of a particular group may be aligned, there are usually differences in strategy, tactics, and sometimes personalities (that's why there are so many different organizations on the left). That absolutely does not mean we cannot reach out, but these are important factors to keep in mind.

When building coalitions and doing outreach, ask yourself: Does this unite us?  
Does this build our power?

# Creating propaganda

We're always looking for new propaganda (though make sure to seek out feedback before sharing it as something that represents HVDSA.)

If you're making something from scratch, you're probably spending too much time on the graphic. Use FREE, pre-made stuff as much as possible. Reuse and repurpose stuff you've made before.

Here are some resources:

- Graphic design for non-designers: <https://bit.ly/30IUvud>
- DSA Design Committee resource: <https://design.dsausa.org/>
- DSArtsenal: <http://bit.ly/DSArtsenal>
- The Noun Project: <http://thenounproject.com>
- Design party: <http://designresources.party>
- How to make a zine:  
<http://www.rookiemag.com/2012/05/how-to-make-a-zine/>

Don't forget about this great [DSA zine stash!](#)

# Fundraising & Requesting \$

Socialist cash takes out the capitalist trash. We need money to survive as an organization and to build power as a movement. People's movements have to fund themselves. Tom Steyer ain't gonna give us a dime. And for the better, we don't want or need his money. Over the course of history, poor and working people have pulled their money to meet collective' needs and build the power to fight the ruling class. We must do the same.

That is why we pay [dues](#) to DSA. That is why those of us who can pay monthly dues to DSA. That is why those of us with some left over after that give to our local Chapter [here](#).

Still, the current DSA structure means paying dues to national are not enough to fully fund our organization. That is why we pass the hat at meetings, host social events, and have a donation jar at nearly all of our events.

While we don't have a formal reimbursement process at present, you can get in touch with our treasurer Susan ([susan.e.priller@gmail.com](mailto:susan.e.priller@gmail.com)) if you have any questions.