

Democratic Socialists of America

Huron Valley

Chapter Handbook



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Welcome, comrade!

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.

Democratic Socialists of America - Huron Valley Chapter seeks to create a system based on justice and equality for all people. We believe everyone deserves to live their own life with dignity. We work to equalize political and economic power, because true democracy cannot coexist with inequality. We urgently fight to stop the many crises facing our most powerless members of society.

We are not a political party. We are an organization of people, united to create a more powerful front against the worst that capitalism has to offer.

DSA strives to be the left-wing counterpart to mainstream politics. Together, we educate the public about democratic socialism and provide a supportive community for folks questioning capitalism and looking and working for an alternative. And of course, we "join the fights" as activists and organizers, too!

This handbook is meant to answer the questions we hear frequently from new members. How do I get started? How do I vote? Where can I find out what the chapter is doing?

Our guide, which is adapted from [DSA SF's handbook](#), is always evolving and if you have a suggestion or a question that isn't answered here you can email us at HuronValleyDSA@gmail.com.

How to become a member

As a democratic, grassroots organization, DSA is continuing the political revolution for the long term. By paying dues, DSA members self-fund our own tools for liberation. No one is turned away for lack of funds. We invite you to join us today!

How to pay your dues

1. Visit <https://dsausa.org/join>
2. Be sure to put in an email address you use regularly. You will get a confirmation email right away with downloadable member resources.
3. Dues are paid annually, and are good for **ONE YEAR**. You must renew every year, or you can sign up for optional monthly dues. Our chapter receives 20% of all monthly dues back. Monthly dues are highly encouraged because they help DSA maintain a stable stream of funds at the national and local level.
4. If you'd like to contribute more directly to our local work, consider donating to our Chuffed campaign at <https://chuffed.org/project/hvdsa-2019>

Dues levels (paid once per year)

Introductory	\$45.00
Regular	\$60.00
Sponsor	\$85.00
Family	\$110.00
Sustainer	\$175.00
Student/Young Democratic Socialists	\$20.00
Low Income	\$27.00
Lifetime for 50 Years	\$750.00

Advice for new members

1. **Meet with one of our internal organizers to discuss how you can best get involved!** It's a lot easier to get involved if you know at-least one person. Fill out our interest form today to get in touch with someone.
2. **Visit our website.** We have a public calendar and everyone (even non-members) are welcome to attend any of our events, actions, or committee meetings. <https://hvdsa.org/>
3. **Add our Internal Google Calendar to your calendar app.** This is a good way to find out what things you can actually attend or help with in the easiest format possible. To add the HVDSA calendar to your existing calendar app, click [here](#).
4. **Attend chapter meetings.** It's where the "democratic" part of our name happens. This is where we vote on resolutions, endorsements, and more. Meetings take place once a month, usually on Thursday evenings or Sunday afternoons. We try to rotate between spaces in Ypsi and Ann Arbor, where most of our members live. You can find out when the next one is on our calendar: <https://hvdsa.org/calendar/>
5. **Join our Slack.** Slack is an online platform that we use to discuss issues, share news, and more! Email us at huronvalleydsa@gmail.com and we'll get you set up!
6. **Check out one of our committees.** In addition to our current chapter-wide campaign on housing, we also have several committees working on labor, healthcare, ecosocialism, solidarity, communications and education, and electoral politics.
7. **Follow us on social media:**
<https://facebook.com/HuronValleyDSA>
<https://twitter.com/HuronValleyDSA>

Talking about Socialism

You're already an expert on talking about socialism. Think about why you, personally, are a socialist. What made you realize you were a socialist? What have you seen, experienced, or learned that has crystallized the need for socialism and made it real to you?

The most effective way to talk about Socialism happens in two parts:

1. A personal story about a problem caused by capitalism
2. The socialist antidote to the problem

Here are some examples:

- **Personal story:** I'm a socialist because I was volunteering in a free clinic and realized that I could be there for ten years and there will be even more people who can't afford co-pays than now. I still do it, but we have to change the capitalist system.
 - **Socialist antidote:** In a socialist society, health care, along with other basic needs like housing and education would be a right that everyone enjoyed, not something only the very rich can afford. What could you do if you didn't have to spend all your time trying to meet basic human needs?
- **Personal story:** I'm a socialist because of my student loans. I've paid about \$27,000 in interest on my student loans, but only \$3,000 towards the principal. I've been paying for 10 years. I feel like an indentured servant that will never be free from my debt.
 - **Socialist antidote:** In a socialist society, education would be seen as a right and available to everyone without needing to go into enormous debt. How would you feel if you were liberated from your debt?

Sometimes you'll get folks with honest misconceptions about socialism asking a question you don't know the answer to. Or bad faith folks might try to "red bait" you by asking something like "but what about Venezuela?" Here's are some great lines that set you up to share your vision for a better society:

- "I don't know about that but I'm a socialist because..."
- "I hadn't considered that but here's my personal experience trying to survive under our current capitalist system..."

Talking About DSA

You're talking to some socialist curious friends and they ask you why you joined DSA. Don't panic—you're already an expert on talking about socialism. Here's a quick explainer about what DSA is.

- DSA is the largest socialist organization in the United States. We're an activist organization, not a political party. It's a big tent which welcomes many different anti-capitalist perspectives. We use a variety of tactics, from legislative to direct action to win a better world for working people.

After that, a really natural place to is talk about how you first heard about DSA and why you joined. Here are some common examples:

- I knew about DSA for awhile but I was really impressed with their fight to win a universal right to counsel for all tenants in San Francisco. I joined because I wanted to work on things that make life easier for working people.
- I heard about DSA from a friend. I used to think that socialism was a good idea, but impractical because the United States seems so conservative.. Then I saw Alexandria Ocasio Cortez win her primary on a socialist platform and I decided that I wanted to get involved.
- I heard about DSA because someone was canvassing for Medicare 4 all. Talking with them made me feel like we can win universal healthcare in the United States. I joined and started volunteering after that.
- I saw a DSA contingent at a rally. It was refreshing to see a lot of people my age organizing and I started going to meetings to see what I could do to get involved.

Voting

Can I vote?

You can vote if:

- You are a national dues-paying member and your dues are current. Remember, no one is too poor for DSA. Get in touch with our chapter leadership today if you are having trouble paying your dues: huronvalleydsa@gmail.com

What do we vote on?

Some examples of what we vote on: bylaws amendments, Steering Committee, delegate positions, Grievance Officers, whether or not we sponsor an event, endorsements for ballot measures and candidates, joining coalitions, initiating projects, etc.

Introduction to Robert's Rules of Order

We use Robert's Rules to help us run votes and debate. Having an agreed on set of procedures allows us to make decisions as efficiently and fairly as possible. The following excerpt is from the **Robert's Rules for Dummies Cheat Sheet**.

Steps for a basic vote

1. The member rises and addresses the chair.
2. The chair recognizes the member.
3. The member makes a motion.
4. Another member seconds the motion.
5. The chair states the motion.
6. The members debate the motion.
7. The chair puts the question, and the members vote.
8. The chair announces the result of the vote.

What is a motion, anyway?

When that light bulb goes off in your head and you have a great idea, you make a motion to get your idea discussed and a decision made.

Until a motion is made, seconded, and stated by the chair, no discussion is in order. This rule of "motion before discussion" saves valuable meeting time. When you start off with a definite proposal — "I move that . . ." — your group discusses the motion's merits and all the details necessary to make a decision. And during the discussion, you and the other members are free to alter your motion as much as necessary before reaching the final decision.

DSA's Structure

<https://dsausa.org>

We're a nationwide organization with over 150 DSA chapters in every state. We're a "big tent" organization which means we welcome a variety of anti-capitalist ideologies and we have no "party line" that chapters must obey.

National staff	National Political Committee	Local chapters
<p>Twenty-person staff, responsible for largely administrative work</p> <p>Updates and distributes membership lists</p> <p>Coordinates our newsletter the <i>Democratic Left</i></p>	<p>Sixteen-person committee elected every two years at the National Convention</p> <p>Currently tasked with three priorities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Developing our Medicare For All campaign2. Developing our relationship with labor groups3. Developing our electoral strategy	<p>Responsible for developing their own structure and bylaws</p> <p>Sends delegates to the national convention</p>

National staff

Here are some of the full-time employees that do the administrative tasks of running DSA. Someone in this list probably mailed you your membership card. See the full staff list [here](#).

Maria Svart, National Director | msvart@dsausa.org

Eileen Casterline Database Manager | ecasterline@dsausa.org

Alison Baldree, Development Director | abaldree@dsausa.org

Anna Bonomo, YDSA Coordinator | anna@dsausa.org

Paula Brantner, National Grievance and Harassment Officer | nationalgrievanceofficer@dsausa.org

Amy Zachmayer, Field officer, MI | amy@dsausa.org

Our Chapter Structure

<https://www.hvdsa.org>

Steering committee	Issue-based committees	Grievance officers
<p>Eight-person committee: <u>two</u> co-chairs, <u>one</u> secretary, <u>one</u> treasurer, and <u>four</u> at-large members who rotate specific organizational roles</p> <p>One-year terms, elected every December</p> <p>Responsible for political leadership and supporting the chapter with administrative tasks</p> <p>Reach them at HuronValleyDsa@gmail.com</p>	<p>Responsible for developing and implementing campaigns, actions, and demonstrations</p> <p>Ideally two co-chairs elected by their committees are responsible for administrative tasks</p> <p>Co-chair terms are flexible</p> <p>Refer to the committee list for contact information</p>	<p>Two officers, elected by the chapter</p> <p>Hear and provide recommendations on grievances against chapter members</p> <p>Reach them at hvdsago@gmail.com</p>

Chapter Bylaws

View bylaws online at <https://hvdsa.org/bylaws>

Our Chapter Structure

Chapter history

Southeast Michigan has had a democratic socialist presence centered in metro Detroit for a number of years. There was an Ann Arbor Local of the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee (DSOC) in the 1970s (DSOC merged with the New American Movement to form DSA in 1983). From the early 1980s, it sought to develop a strong relationship with the local Democratic Party and succeeded in gaining a position of substantial influence. That group had a newsletter which was distributed to both the local progressive community and the Washtenaw County Democrats, as well as a formal political action committee whose support was actively sought by many state and local candidates. Lowell Peterson, one of the group's key activists, served several terms on the Ann Arbor City Council, and most of the rest of the Council Democrats were influenced by DSOC. Unfortunately, toward the end of the 80s, most of the key activists left the area, and after several years it was decided to merge with the rising Greater Detroit Local, one of the strongest DSA locals in the country.

During the national membership surge of late 2016 to early 2017, our numbers grew tremendously in Washtenaw, Livingston, Lenawee, Jackson, and Hillsdale counties. Our chapter started meeting in early February, and we began by organizing a few well-attended socialist reading groups. From there, it became clear that there was an immense amount of interest in our organization and politics, and we became an organizing committee very quickly. Our first task was to set up the internal structures of our group and to begin building relationships with local groups already doing great work around a number of issues. We became an official chapter in early July 2017 and expanded our work by building new coalitions and working within existing ones. Then we elected our first Steering Committee in late July 2017. Since then, our membership has continued to grow as we expand our fight for socialism, always guided by our principle of solidarity with oppressed, marginalized, and exploited people throughout the world. With your passion, skills, and energy, the future is ours to make!

Committees

Our committees are where the real work of the chapter gets done. They are responsible for developing and implementing campaigns, actions, demonstrations, and social events.

Committee name	Email address
Steering Committee Chapter Leadership	HuronValleyDSA@gmail.com
Ecosocialism Championing ecosocialism and supporting local communities	hvdsa.environment@gmail.com
Labor Supporting and building the local labor movement	hvdsa.labor@gmail.com
GRR (Gender Representing Revolutionaries) Caucus	See Slack channel.
Fundraising Raising funds for material change	hvdsa.fundraising@gmail.com
Communication + Education Furthering our chapter's understanding of socialism	hvdsa.comm.ed@gmail.com
Electoral Strategizing and coordinating work in electoral politics	hvdsa.electoral@gmail.com
Healthcare Universal healthcare and healthcare justice	hvdsa.healthcare@gmail.com
Housing Universal housing, publicly controlled housing	hvdsa.housing@gmail.com
Solidarity Showing up for comrades!	hvdsa.solidarity@gmail.com

Communications Etiquette

At Huron Valley DSA we use several different technologies to help us organize. These are the most popular services and products we tend to use.

Communication platforms

HVDSA committee members regularly use the following:

- [Google Groups](#) - forum style e-mailing lists
- [Signal](#) - private encrypted texting
- [Slack](#) - open chat rooms with added features

When joining a committee, you will typically be added to the committee Google Group. If you wish to be added to the other platforms or you're not sure if you've been added to a committee Google Group, email the committee co-chairs at the addresses provided in the previous section.

Google Group etiquette

Use this when you need to contact the entire group and want to be able to view your messages in the future. This is especially useful for sharing information, resources, and links to the entire committee. Added benefits of being in a Google Group is access to the Google Drive and the Internal Calendar.

Signal etiquette

Use this when you want encrypted secure messaging with either individuals or chat groups. Messages disappear after a set time decided by members of the chat. Using this app requires giving your phone number to everyone in the committee and will replace the default text messenger on your phone. Keep Signal usage to messages that are urgent or require immediate feedback, require higher security, and that you don't need saved in the chat history.

Slack etiquette

Slack is a full featured instant messenger with many useful features for document sharing. It is not a secure messaging platform and is meant for non-emergency communication. Use this for workshopping in groups, requesting immediate feedback, and fun conversations. Keep Signal usage to messages that are urgent or require immediate feedback, require moderate security, and that you don't need saved in the chat history.

Code of Conduct

Purpose

The Huron Valley Democratic Socialists of America (HVDSA) is dedicated to providing a harassment-free experience for everyone. We do not tolerate harassment of comrades in any form. This Code of Conduct outlines our expectations for all those who participate in our community, as well as the consequences for unacceptable behavior. We invite everyone to help us create safe and positive experiences for everyone.

What happens in case of violations of our Code of Conduct?

Members and guests asked to stop any hateful or disrespectful behavior are expected to comply immediately. If a person insists on such behavior, the administrators may take any action they deem appropriate, including warning or removing them from the event, communication channel, etc.

If you are being treated disrespectfully or harassed, notice that someone else is being treated disrespectfully or harassed, or have any other concerns, please point out the problem to the administrator or any member you feel comfortable talking to as soon as possible.

If you want help resolving the conflict with our conflict resolution team you can make a request at hvdsago@gmail.com

For now, any egregious violation where someone has made you feel unsafe or physically threatened should be reported here: You can also report any serious violation here: HuronValleyDSA@gmail.com

Addressing Grievances

If you feel you have been falsely or unfairly accused of violating this Code of Conduct, you should notify one of the event organizers via email or in person with a concise description of your grievance. Your grievance will be handled in accordance with our existing governing policies.

Expected Behavior

Participate in an authentic and active way. In doing so, you contribute to the health and longevity of this community. Exercise consideration and respect in your speech and actions. Attempt collaboration before conflict. Refrain from demeaning, discriminatory, or harassing behavior and speech.

Please avoid making assumptions. If you aren't aware of what someone's gender is, and you can't figure out what pronoun to use, just ask or look at our name tags, where you may find their name and favourite pronoun!

Please ask before touching anyone at our events. It's easy, and the worst thing that happens is someone says no! That includes hugging—you might not know that it makes some people uncomfortable, but it does, so please ask first.

Be mindful of your surroundings and the other participants. Alert community leaders if you notice a dangerous situation, someone in distress, or violations of this Code of Conduct, even if they seem inconsequential.

Unacceptable Behavior

Unacceptable behaviors include: intimidating, harassing, abusive, discriminatory, intentional misgendering, derogatory or demeaning speech or actions by any participant in our community online, at all related events and in one-on-one communications carried out in the context of community business. Community event venues may be shared with members of the public; please be respectful to all patrons of these locations.

Harassment includes:

- Harmful or prejudicial verbal or written comments related to gender, sexual orientation, transness, physical appearance, body size, ability, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, religion (or lack thereof) and other personal conditions and choices
- Trolling, i.e. sustained disruption of conversations, talks or other events
- Non-consensual photography or recording
- Inappropriate use of nudity and/or sexual images in public spaces (including presentation slides)
- Deliberate intimidation, stalking or following

- non-consensual physical contact
- unwelcome sexual attention
- microaggressions, i.e. small, subtle, often subconscious actions that marginalize people from oppressed groups
- minimizing other people's experiences

Representing HVDSA

The reputation of our chapter is based on socialist ideals and accurate representation of our chapter values. Unacceptable representation includes:

- claiming to speak on behalf or represent the chapter without the chapter's approval
- reporting on closed meetings or reporting without consent

Photos/Videos

Ask everybody in the picture if they agree to be photographed or filmed.

For group shots, ask if anyone wants to opt-out before taking any, or ask people if they need their face obscured after taking photos.

Meeting agreements

Meetings are more productive—and more fun—when the conversation includes everyone. Respectful discussion guidelines are helpful for keeping things focused too. You can read these before meetings and forums.

1. Assume good faith in your fellow comrades

Assume good faith in each other. Please try to speak from experience, speak for yourself, and actively listen to each other. When someone makes a point, repeat what you heard, summarize, and ask clarifying questions like “did you mean X” or “what makes you say that” to get more information. Encourage yourself and others to maintain a positive attitude, honor the work of others, avoid defensiveness, be open to legitimate critique and challenge oppressive behaviors in ways that help people grow. We want to “call each other in” rather than calling each other out—in other words, if you are challenging someone’s ideas or behavior, do it respectfully, and if you are being challenged, receive it respectfully. Remember, mistakes will be made, nobody is perfect.

2. Know whether you need to “step up” or “step back”

Help create a safe and inclusive space for everybody. Please respect others by recognizing how often, much, and loud you’re speaking and whether or not you’re dominating the conversation. Step back to leave space for others to voice their opinions and feelings. If the facilitator of the meeting asks you to wrap up, recognize that you should step back. This especially applies to participants who have privileged backgrounds. On the other hand, if you don’t often speak up, we encourage you to do so now!

3. Please ask yourself “Why am I Talking?”

We have a limited amount of time for discussion and to accomplish the tasks before us. When in discussion, please ask yourself “Why am I talking (WAIT)?” Consider whether or not what you want to say has already been said, whether what you want to say is on topic or if there’s a better time and place to say it, and other methods for showing how you feel about the conversation (nodding your head, etc.).

4. Please recognize and respect other's feelings, background, and cultural differences

Many people have different levels of experience, knowledge, and feelings in social justice and radical activism and all participants should respect and embrace this diversity. Many people from different backgrounds have different definitions of what it means to be an “activist” or “radical.” While we all don't have to agree on everything, we should respect our diversity of opinions. Recognize that everyone has a piece of the truth, everybody can learn, and everybody has the ability to teach and share something. Don't use language that's clearly oppressive or hurtful. Please, refrain from using acronyms or complicated language that could exclude others.

5. We have “one mic” so do not interrupt or speak while others are talking

Many of us will have different opinions on matters. However, speaking while others are talking or adding comments when they cannot respond appropriately does not build community. If you have a disagreement, wait for your turn to address it. This is basic politeness.

6. Respect the facilitator when they use Progressive Stack

Progressive Stack is a form of leading discussions which involves a facilitator keeping a list of names of people who wish to speak. The facilitator scans the group during the discussion, and if someone wishes to speak, they raise their hand and catch the facilitator's eye. The facilitator nods and makes eye contact to indicate the person is now put on the list to speak, and then the person can put their hand down so it does not distract other discussion participants. However, the facilitator does not simply write a list of names in the order that people raise their hand. Rather, if someone who has not spoken raises their hand, they go to the top of the list. If someone who is of an oppressed group raises their hand, they go to the top of the list unless they have already contributed significantly to the discussion.

7. Jargon Giraffe

If someone uses a term that you don't know, just ask! If they're in the middle of talking, instead of interrupting, you can put your hand up in a kind of 🙋 looking way.