



GUIDELINES FOR STARTING A NEW LOCAL

August 2016

Congratulations! If you are reading this, you have probably expressed interest, recently, in starting a new chapter of the Maryland Green Party. This document is intended to help Maryland Greens get started at organizing new chapters, which are referred to as “Locals.”

What is the Maryland Green Party?

The Maryland Green Party is a political committee recognized by the State of Maryland for the purposes of nominating candidates to run for federal, state, county, and local elections.

What is a “Local”?

A Local is the basic decision-making and organizing entity of the Maryland Green Party. Our bylaws state that in order to be recognized as a Local, the entity must be composed of *at least* 3 members, hold regular meetings, and keep those meetings open to all Maryland Greens and interested persons. The duties of a Local, described in bylaws, are to maintain a record of its membership, share that information with the MGP, maintain a log of meeting minutes, and send representatives to participate in the Coordinating Committee and standing committees of the MGP, including coordinating electoral activity with the MGP Electoral Committee. While most locals are organized within a specific geographic or political boundary, locals have also organized across these boundaries and also around mutual interests.



What do Locals do, really?

The primary goal of the local should be aligned with the primary goal of the Maryland Green Party -- recruit, nominate, and run candidates to be elected to federal, state, and local office. To this end, MGP locals can engage in a variety of organizing activities that help build their local and state party, recruit and promote candidates during off years, and help effect change in their communities (with or without a Green Party office holder). Some of these events include but are not limited to:

WORK ON ELECTING GREEN PARTY CANDIDATES: If your local has nominated a candidate(s) for a local office, your local will probably be devoting most of its time to working on those campaign(s). If your local does not have a candidate running for office, your local might consider volunteering for campaigns in other parts of the state, or focusing on supporting an “up ballot” candidate for U.S. Senate, U.S. House of Representatives, or president.

RECRUITING CANDIDATES FOR LOCAL, STATE, AND FEDERAL OFFICES: Green Party locals are vital in the process of identifying and vetting potential Green Party candidates within their local jurisdictions. These individuals might be active Greens or they could be someone that you have been working alongside in community projects or issue advocacy.

REGISTERING VOTERS: In order to participate in Democracy, you have to be registered to vote. MGP locals try to stay current on their training to be a voter registrar and register voters at any given opportunity. Most county board of elections will provide training to groups of individuals after each election cycle is complete. Or you can visit the BOE to receive training in person.

COALITION BUILDING/PARTICIPATION: Working with like minded groups within a local's community to help bring about change. When no coalitions exist, MGP locals have found success in building grassroots coalitions. It is important for the Green Party to remain an active participant in the community in between elections.

LOBBYING: This is a great way to learn the political process so your candidates and campaigns can speak more effectively about the issues and how they will govern if elected. MGP locals have engaged in lobbying efforts at both the local and state levels in Maryland. They have sought to educate their local members about a set of issues, and organize one on one meetings with legislators to help explain policy positions, offer support or explain opposition to draft legislation, and attempt to persuade legislators to support their position on a piece of legislation. This often overlaps with coalition building/participation.

PUBLIC PROMOTION: This can be as simple as identifying events, that provide your local visibility within the community, where you can set up a table/tent to register voters, engage in petition signature gathering (when appropriate), and provide additional information about Green Party advocacy efforts and Green Party candidates.



COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT: This might overlap with coalition building/participation. Working with like minded organizations within your community on a common project. Sometimes these projects can be as simple as a clean up day or a building/gardening project that might require continued participation over time.

PETITIONING: The Maryland Green Party is still required to collect petition signatures of registered voters in order to maintain its status as a minor political party within the State of Maryland. This occurs every four years and is vital to the ongoing success of the Maryland Green Party and the Green Party US as a whole. Every local is expected to assist with this process.

Note – It takes TIME to really build a Local. It takes years. Start small. Keep it simple. Your Local will build over time. Also, make sure you seek support from Maryland Greens in other Locals. We're here to help. Above all, have FUN with it!

Great! Now what??

Okay, so you have a few people in your area who want to get together and form an MGP Local. What happens now???

What you do with your Local is entirely up to you and the other members. Below we have listed a set of suggestions, ideas, recommendations and guidelines to help you be successful.

- **MEETINGS:** Set up an accessible meeting time and location. Meetings should take place in a public location: cafe with a backroom, library meeting room, community center meeting room, etc. Find a good central location with plenty of access by a variety of transportation options. Also figure out a regular time that works for people. Often, a weekday evening, from 7 p.m. - 8:30 p.m. is a good meeting time.

- * **CONSENSUS DECISION-MAKING:** Maryland Green Party group decision making operates by using a modified consensus process for most matters. Everyone should have an opportunity and equal time to speak about an issue being decided. The goal is for everyone within the local to unanimously agree on a decision. Sometimes this process can involve a lot of discussion and other times the group can agree quickly. The most important part, however, is that everyone feels they have had the opportunity to speak about the issue, all their questions have been answered to their satisfaction, and that the ultimate decision is one that most if not all members support. In cases where an individual or individuals are not in agreement and consensus is not possible, the local can determine to make the decision by vote.

- **PICK AN AREA OF FOCUS. START SMALL AND MAKE IT FUN!** In some ways, we are bound to the election calendar. It is an exciting time to join the Maryland Green Party. We have an exciting presidential candidate (Jill Stein) and a fantastic candidate for Senate (Margaret Flowers.) In addition, you may live in an area where people can vote for one of our excellent Congressional Candidates. Your Local can focus on building the Green Party name by promoting these candidates. Hold events and parties that promote these candidates. Pass out their flyers. Coordinate with



the campaigns to see how your Local can help. If you can connect with people in your area by promoting these campaigns, you will be able to recruit more members to your Local. Work hard through November 8th. Make it fun and exciting. Then, you will have built the basic structure of a Local and you can go from there.

- **RESPONSIBILITIES:** As you connect with more people, and start bringing them to your meetings, be conscious of responsibilities. Someone should facilitate the meeting. What will be the agenda? Who will keep the meeting notes? Who has everyone's contact information? How will you communicate with each other between meeting? How will meetings be advertised? It may be worthwhile to decide on specific roles for people to play. Vote on coordinators to handle various areas of responsibility. There could be a "meeting chair," a "social media coordinator," a volunteer coordinator, an outreach organizer, or an events-planning team. Eventually, you might want to hold an election and pick "Co-chairs" of your Local, along with a Secretary, Treasurer, etc. Start by addressing the present needs. Go from there. As your party grows you must be careful not to overwhelm newcomers by immediately putting them on committees, or assigning them high profile roles within the local. Let new individuals become comfortable with your local and how you operate. As small opportunities arise, such as tabling at an event, make sure you invite new individuals to participate alongside someone who has been involved for a while. Do not overwhelm them or expect them to step up and take on big roles within your local. This advice may seem obvious, but this has happened time and time again not just in MGP locals, but in almost every other political or community organization out there.

- **MAKE IT PARTY!** We're engaging in a political revolution. It will only succeed if we have a good time doing it (if people aren't having fun, they will find other things to do!). It's good to hold social events and build friendships. Maintaining attitudes of cooperation and openness are essential. As personalities start to emerge and conflict, do your best to keep it positive. Go with the flow. Keep in mind that this is a PARTY, and we should try to make it the most positive experience possible.



