

How Activism Works

Activism is the process by which we build leaders that use money, people, and lists to create political change. Included in this process is identifying aligned students through issue based recruitment, educating and training them on the mechanics of politics, and mobilizing them to apply pressure to their school administration or government officials in the pursuit of policy change. Each part of the process has a corresponding benefit and it results in a step towards the society that we want to live in.

Everything starts with individual leaders. If not you, then who? Activism is the best way to learn how to lead. Participating in your YAL chapter will teach you how to communicate confidently, organize complex events, and create political change. Anyone is capable of mastering these skills if they have sustained enthusiasm. You will become capable of recruiting strangers, training new activists, and applying pressure to politicians and bureaucrats. Political victory is decided by the number of effective activists on each side. Our objective in the chapter is to train as many activists as we can and mobilize them in our political battles.

A political battle is advantageous if it can build money, people, and lists. Money comes from donors that believe in the cause and the battles chosen. It can be used to reward volunteers, pay dedicated staff, and purchase necessary supplies. YAL has a number of national staffers that focus on raising money, and this skill can also be taught to local organizers. People are volunteers that join our cause because the change we're fighting for is important to them. They are willing to invest time and talent. Lists are a collection of contact info of people that care about the issue. Some people on the list will accept the invite to their first meeting and go on to become activists, while others will only be willing to apply pressure in our political fight through attending a rally or making a phone call. Following up with your list and carefully managing it is key to getting the most out of it. The best way to build a list is through active petitioning or tabling on campus with a QR code webform or a paper sign up sheet. Money, people, and lists are the raw resources that student leaders wield to create change.

Once leadership has been developed and money, people and lists acquired we can contest elections and pressure existing officials to change tyrannical policies. This requires the application of the confrontational politics model which will be described in detail in the future discussion workshops. Already we have elected 270+ champions in state legislatures across the country, made 91 million Americans more free with just the legislation passed last year, and freed countless students from authoritarian campus policies. These results only happen when we rise to the challenge and perform effective activism.

Discussion Questions

1. What is a skill you want to develop through your participation in your YAL chapter?
2. What do you want your YAL chapter to look like and be capable of?
3. What is one policy that we could fight for on or off campus?
4. Which of the policies discussed above would be best to build money, people and lists off of?
5. What involvement do you want to have in politics after school?