



STEP ONE: PLANNING

ORGANIZE A STUDENT MOVEMENT

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

— MARGARET MEAD

- A. Organize a Successful Meeting6
- B. Build Your Team9
- C. Collect Signatures on Petitions10
- D. Organize an Event12
- E. Reach Out to Other Groups on Campus14

In this toolkit, we explain how you can create a Democracy Is For People campaign at your university. You may already be part of a group that wants to pursue this as a campaign. The first step to starting a new campaign is finding others who are just as passionate about defending and strengthening our democracy as you are.

If you are setting up a new group, make sure to register it with your school to qualify for student activities funding. You may need a minimum number of students interested and a faculty member willing to be an advisor. Be prepared to explain the purpose of your group and how it will enhance student life at your school. Registration rules and availability of funding vary by school.

Also, register your group with Public Citizen’s Democracy Is For People campaign in Washington, D.C., at democracyisforpeople.org/students. We are working with partners to build a national movement of students doing what it takes to limit corporate spending in elections. Registering helps us support your efforts. We’ll continue to share resources such as fact sheets, stickers, stamps, and posters, and where possible connect you with other student organizers and the media.

A. ORGANIZE A SUCCESSFUL MEETING

Think seriously about your goals for your campaign and how your first meeting will set you up to achieve them. Too many fledgling student organizations bring a crowd to their first meeting, only to lose students’ interest at the meeting itself or in the weeks after. The steps that follow are essential for the success of your campaign.

I. DEFINE YOUR OBJECTIVES

For your first meeting, we recommend these five objectives:

- Bring together students in your university who are passionate about getting corporate money out of politics and building a more just society.



- Educate them about the *Citizens United* ruling, corporate money in elections, and the need for a constitutional amendment. (See APPENDIX for factsheets and resources.)
- Explain that the ultimate goal is a student government resolution and discuss the steps to get there.
- Hold a discussion to solicit attendees' concerns, ideas, and goals.
- Lay out your proposed plan of action, delegate roles, and schedule your next meeting. (Steps One through Three of this toolkit offer a sample plan of action).

2. PICK THE DATE, TIME, AND PLACE

Plan the meeting to last around 1–1.5 hours. Select a date and time when most individuals are available and on campus, such as Monday through Thursday nights. Check to ensure there are no major events on campus that might conflict with yours.

Think about a location on campus that is easiest for most students to reach (e.g. student union, library, classroom), and reserve the space through the appropriate department at your school. Consider locations and times that are likely to work for students who commute to campus, work a lot of hours, or have a physical disability.

3. RECRUIT STUDENTS WHO CARE

Recruitment efforts not only can help you identify like-minded people, but they also can serve as a tool for educating your peers about *Citizens United*, corporate personhood, and a constitutional amendment.

Build a Diverse Group from Day One

- In planning for your first meeting, think about how to make your group diverse across gender, race, and income groups. *Citizens United* affects all communities, but in particular it marginalizes the voices of under-resourced communities of color. It is essential that people from these communities are represented.
- Don't expect your meeting to be diverse by default. Take the time to reach out to different communities on your campus, invite people to attend, and make everyone feel welcome. If you miss the chance to create a multi-racial group, it will be much harder to make this change down the road. Make sure there is space to discuss the issue from a racial and economic justice perspective.
- If you are at a university, it may be wise to reach out to different schools and graduate student organizations.

As you think about how you'd like to run your first meeting, here are some ways to bring people to it:

Reach out to Friends and Acquaintances: Talk to your friends one-on-one and invite them to the meeting, and ask them to commit to coming and bringing someone with them who also might be interested. Remind them the day before or the day of by phone, email, and/or text. Know that up to half the people who committed to come may not show up.

Class Announcements: Find a few large-sized classes at your university that likely have students interested in getting big money out of elections (e.g. government, public policy, political science). Ask the professor if you can make an announcement! Keep it brief, a minute or two at the most, to keep your audience's attention. Also, pass around sign-up sheets before you start, to collect contact information. Don't forget them when you leave. Speak slowly, smile, be confident – you are giving them an opportunity to make a real difference!



Email Listservs: Can you email dorm lists or student groups? Ask for permission before emailing the listservs of any student organizations; pick those that focus on advocacy or political issues (See APPENDIX pg. xiii for sample email). We suggest presenting at each student organization’s meeting to get their support first.

Campus Tabling: Sign up to host a table on your campus and make a sign to tell everyone what your organization is about. Remember to bring pens, clipboards, sign-up sheets, a big sign or two, and fact sheets. If you want to make the most impact, stand in front of your table; don’t sit behind it. Don’t be afraid to speak up to students as they walk by!

Fliers: Put up posters around campus where students frequently go, such as the student union, library, coffee shops, student store, or dorms (See APPENDIX pg. xiv for sample flier). You may be able to put mini-flyers in student mailboxes also. Posters should not be your primary means of recruitment, as it is the least effective and can be very time-consuming.

Social Media: See APPENDIX pg. x for our social media guide.

A General Tip: Someone once said, “If you feed them, they will come.” Free food will always draw a crowd. Some universities even have listservs that detail all of the free food events on campus for the week.

4. COLLECT YOUR MATERIALS

- If you’re able to serve food, and once you have an idea of how many students will attend, purchase the food and drink you think you’ll need. Ask local restaurants if they would be willing to donate food – often, restaurants popular with students are willing to give student groups discounts.
- Find out which presentation resources your school can provide and gather those things they can’t. (e.g., a projector, screen, video equipment, and microphone might be obtained from campus services or a co-sponsoring group) Make sure there is a chalkboard, whiteboard, or flipchart and markers available for you to post your agenda, contact information, and useful websites, and to brainstorm info and your campaign plan.
- Don’t forget to bring a sign-in sheet to collect attendees’ names and contact information.

5. RUN THE MEETING

- Start with a brief presentation: introduce yourself, the issue, and the campaign, and explain why it’s important to you.
- Ask your guests to sign the contact sheet so you can update them and keep them involved. Remind them to sign the petition if they haven’t already done so.
- Designate someone to take notes.
- Consider showing The Story of Citizens United v. FEC video (storyofcitizensunited.org) to get the conversation rolling and make sure people know the basic issue you’re focusing on. Try to get a classroom with a projector so the video really makes an impact. Make sure to test the equipment well in advance.
- If you have a small enough group, ask everyone to introduce themselves and to share one or two sentences about why they came to the meeting and what part of the issue they find most interesting or concerning.
- Prepare some questions ahead of a time and consider having a discussion. Questions might include: What are the problems *Citizens United* presents for our democracy? Whose voices get heard and whose



get ignored when money dominates the democratic process? Should corporations have the same rights as humans? How do the priorities of corporations differ from humans? What can we do as students to address the problem? Remember you're providing a space for people to connect, so let others speak!

- Make sure the meeting is fun! Feel free to tell jokes and be informal. We want people to do serious work about a serious topic, but you and your group members shouldn't feel it's a chore.
- Share information about the actions students can take to pass a student government resolution denouncing *Citizens United* and calling for a constitutional amendment. Ask others for their ideas. Discuss and decide your next steps.
- Decide who is responsible for following up with each step. Don't be afraid to let the room be silent for longer than feels comfortable if no one volunteers right away. Sometimes people need time to think through what they want to commit to. You don't want to end up doing all the work yourself. It's more meaningful when everyone has a role to play on your team.
- Conclude by making sure you have everyone's contact information and that you share the date, location and time of the next meeting.
- Ask someone to type up notes and send them to the group with the things people committed to do before the next meeting (action items) at the top.
- Send a follow-up email within 24 hours thanking everyone for coming and sharing the notes with the action items with your next meeting time right at the top. Remind attendees about the next meeting a couple of times.

B. BUILD YOUR TEAM

With your first meeting concluded, hopefully you now have some idea of what your campus campaign is going to look like. To sustain a campaign, it's important to delegate leadership roles. This will help build leadership skills within your group and make sure that no one person has too much on their plate. Some of these roles are appropriate for a team; if you have enough people you may want to create committees to execute these same tasks. Do make sure there still one person clearly assigned to each task. We recommend these four positions, but please adapt them to your own situation:

I. RECRUITMENT COORDINATOR

This coordinator leads "on-the-ground" outreach, personally educating and recruiting students, and collecting petitions on campus. They can use the same steps outlined under "Recruit Students Who Care" (p. 7). All team members should help with recruitment as it's critical for everything else you do.

2. COALITIONS AND UNIVERSITY RELATIONS COORDINATOR

This coordinator and/or committee reaches out to:

- (1) Other student organizations to garner their support
- (2) Student government representatives who are critical to getting a resolution passed

3. LOGISTICS COORDINATOR

This coordinator and/or committee oversees the operational details of the campaign's events, from reserving weekly meeting space to ensuring all of the required resources for an event are available. This includes applying for university funds and overseeing fundraising activities.



4. COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR

This coordinator and/or committee oversees outreach to your school newspaper and local newspapers, radio, blogs, and TV stations. They develop a clear campaign message under the guidance of the entire team and assist the recruitment committee in spreading it. They also can help create a website and other materials.

C. COLLECT SIGNATURES ON PETITIONS

Petitioning on campus is an excellent way to build support for a constitutional amendment. It's also simple and easy to do! It allows you to educate people face-to-face and develop a list of people to invite to meetings and events.

Already, more than two million people have signed petitions for a constitutional amendment to restore fair elections. That's a fantastic start, but we need many more voices to be powerful enough to take our democracy back from corporations.

I. HOW TO PETITION

We've all been approached by people with clipboards asking us to take a moment to listen to their cause and sign on if we support it. Think about the last time you stopped. What was it about the petitioner's approach that persuaded you to lend your support? Probably he or she was friendly, approachable, and passionate about the issue. Within a few seconds you were able to understand what they were asking for and why, in simple terms that felt relevant to you.

It's that simple. Just be friendly and explain in simple language why you got involved and why it matters.

Bring a friend or two! Like most things in life, gathering signatures is more fun to do in good company.

2. WHERE AND WHEN TO PETITION

Go where people at your university congregate, such as the quad or the student union during high-traffic periods such as between classes. You can also wait outside of classes or general lectures likely to have politically minded students attending. If it's a class related to *Citizens United* or a similar topic, ask the professor if you can make an announcement about the petition and pass it around the class.

3. WHAT TO BRING

- Copies of the petition (See APPENDIX pg xii for sample petition)
- Copies of the fact sheet (See pg. 2-4 of this toolkit)
- One or more clipboards
- Pens
- If you have a table, bring a sign to attract attention and engage passersby.
- You can request signs, stickers, and buttons from Public Citizen by emailing amendment@citizen.org.



4. HOW TO APPROACH PEOPLE

Smile and make eye contact. Keep it short and simple. It will be hard to keep people's attention if you offer a long introduction. Some ideas:

- “Hi! Want to help stop corruption of our elections?”
- “Hi! Want to help stop the corporate takeover of our democracy?”
- “Hi! Have a minute to help get big money out of politics?”
- “Hi! Want to stop the 1% from buying our democracy?”

Some people may immediately know what you're talking about and eagerly sign the petition. Be sure to thank them for their support. Others may want more information. Thank them for asking, and tell them the basics. Offer them a copy of the fact sheet if they want to read more, and/or direct them to www.DemocracyIsForPeople.org, where they can learn more and watch videos.

5. HOW TO RETURN COMPLETED PETITIONS

To return the completed petitions to Public Citizen, please follow the email or fax instructions at the bottom of the petition page (see APPENDIX pg. xii). This is important. We want to make sure those who signed are counted when we present petitions to members of Congress.

6. STRATEGIES FOR MAXIMIZING PETITION SIGNATURES:

- If circulating in a crowd, approach groups of two or more, so several people at once hear your explanation about the petition.
- Have multiple clipboards available, so more than one person can sign at the same time.
- If tabling, stand in front of the table and actively invite people who pass by to sign the petition (compared to sitting silently behind the table, waiting for people to approach you).
- If at a sit-down event, make an announcement about the petition (if appropriate) before circulating clipboards through the audience.
- Set personal and collective goals. For example, 50 petition signatures at a weekend farmer's market or 500 signatures by the end of the month.
- Electronic Petitioning: If you have a portable computer and access to a table in a location with wireless Internet and a power source, you can set up your computer and encourage people to sign the petition online at www.DemocracyIsForPeople.org.
- Make sure to ask students to put a star by their names if they'd like to get more involved in your campus group. Follow up with them within 24 hours letting them know how they can engage.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: What if someone asks a question and I don't know the answer?

A: Share what you do know, have a fact sheet available, and encourage people to watch the Story of Citizens United video or visit DemocracyIsForPeople.org for more information. You also can offer to take their contact information and get back to them later. Don't guess or make stuff up.

Q: What if someone says they're not interested in signing?

A: That's ok! Some people may not be interested. No matter what, remain polite and try not to spend too much time debating the issue. Lots of potential petition signers could pass by if you spend a long time talking to one person who isn't going to sign.

Q: What if someone doesn't want to fill in all of his or her information?

A: Some people, for privacy or other reasons, may not wish to provide all the information requested. At very least, people need to fill in their full name and voting ZIP code to be counted. We strongly encourage them to include their email address too, which will allow us to keep them involved.

If you have any questions, ideas, or additional tips you would like to share, please don't hesitate to contact amendment@citizen.org, or call us at 202-588-1000 and ask for the Democracy Is For People Campaign. We are here to support you!

D. ORGANIZE AN EVENT

Educational events are a great way to help launch a campaign for an amendment. They can include a movie screening, a discussion with an expert or professor who supports an amendment, or something more fun and creative (see below for some ideas). Invite the media to attend your event to make sure even those who can't attend hear about it.

I) MOVIE SCREENING

There are a couple of really great films that will educate your audience about the problem of corporate power and money in politics.

- a. "Priceless" is a 60-minute film that talks about the broad problem with money in politics and ends with the *Citizens United* ruling. It can be ordered here: <http://priceless.bullfrogcommunities.com/>.
- b. Check out the 8-minute Story of Citizens United (www.storyofcitizensunited.org) video. It's a great discussion starter.
- c. There is also a funny 3-minute music video explaining Super PACs at <http://bit.ly/AkJCyM>.

2) SPEAKER

Inviting a speaker who knows about the issue of money in politics, or even a professor who is an expert in the area, is one way to reach more people. Before you invite someone to speak, research or talk to them first about their views on an amendment. You don't want to pour a lot of energy into organizing an event, only to find out your star speaker doesn't support an amendment!

Keep in mind that if you want to invite a speaker from far away you may need to schedule the event several months ahead, perhaps even for the next semester.

The staff at the Democracy Is For People Campaign at Public Citizen travel frequently and may be passing through your area. We are available for larger events (50+ attendees). If you are struggling to find a local speaker, call us at Public Citizen and ask for the Democracy Is For People Campaign at 202-588-1000.



3) RALLY

If you have a lot of supporters, you can work with your coalition partners to hold a rally for an amendment. Do this only if you can be sure it will be big (50-100 people) or if you have a catchy visual that will make your event pressworthy.

4) GET CREATIVE!

- a. **Student or Professor Debate** – Bring together professors who care about campaign finance to speak about why we need an amendment or to debate a professor who disagrees. You can also work with a political science club to put on a student debate.
- b. **Money and Politics Trivia** – Hold a trivia contest on the impacts of money in politics and the different things we can do to address the problem.

This is a fun way to educate people and engage them enough to get involved. Make sure you arrange for food and prizes.

- c. **Slam for Democracy** – Do a poetry slam on the topic of money in politics. How does this issue affect so many other things people care about from affordable education to international peace to the environment?
- d. **Run for Democracy!** – Hold a race around campus during a busy time of day between a “candidate” who has the benefit of rich corporate donors and one who doesn’t. Get creative. Dress up in zany costumes. Have volunteers play the role of rich donors betting on the candidates with play money, while others play the role of constituents trying to get a candidate to listen to them about an issue. Make sure to use large signs to indicate who is playing what role.

One rule could be that for every sidewalk square around the quad they run, they have to raise a certain amount of money to move forward. Super PAC characters can throw up posters of negative and misleading “ads” to block the candidate’s way. Or every time a donor calls, they have to stop running and take the call. Maybe one candidate loses too much time talking to constituents instead of raising money. We don’t recommend putting party politics into your event. This is an issue that all parties care about – we can’t win without support from members of major parties and don’t want any individual to feel excluded from the issue based on party affiliation.

A party at the end for the “winner” can offer free food and a discussion of how students can get involved. Make sure to have lots of handouts to explain what you are doing. Invite people to attend the “party” or otherwise get involved, and have a couple of petitioners on hand.

- e. **Money and Politics Song Contest or Benefit Concert** – Invite people to make up or repurpose an existing song to highlight how ridiculous it is that corporations and the wealthy are buying our elections. Or throw a fundraising/awareness raising concert with popular local or student bands. Show the Story of Citizens United film and do a short talk about the campaign before the show. Ask the bands or performers to mention why they care about this issue when they are onstage.

Whatever creative event you do, make sure you videotape it and share it with us at amendment@citizen.org. We may want to share your ideas and materials with others.

You’ll find more tools for organizing your event at www.resolutionsweek.org.



E. REACH OUT TO OTHER GROUPS ON CAMPUS

Partnering with other student organizations is crucial to putting pressure on your student government representatives and university leaders to support a constitutional amendment. Corporate money in politics affects nearly every public policy issue.

Before you approach an organization, think about how money in politics impacts them specifically, then frame the discussion with that in mind. For instance, environmental groups should care because *Citizens United* strengthens the power of the fossil fuel industry, which wants to handcuff the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), extend the Keystone Pipeline, and allow fracking to pollute local water supplies. For handouts on how money in politics impacts different policies and issues, visit: <http://democracyisforpeople.org/factsheets-polls>.

Ask the organization's leaders how involved they would like to be. Would they be interested in co-hosting an event with you? Or including their name on press statements?

Here are several kinds of organizations that might be interested:

Political and Activist Organizations

Find other groups working on university, local, state, or national issues. *Citizens United* impacts every level of government (see How Does *Citizens United* Affect My City? fact sheet on www.resolutionsweek.org).

Student of Color Organizations

African-Americans and Latinos, (as well as students and older people) are being targeted with voter suppression tactics in many states. Corporate executives like the Koch brothers, who are funding voter ID and suppression efforts nationwide (see American Legislative Exchange Council), are also using unlimited election funding to drown out the voices of low-income people and people of color.¹ Ask allied student of color groups about ways you might collaborate to expose this corporate-funded attack on our democracy and civil rights. They might want to organize an event on the topic and/or involve their membership in an event you are planning.

Graduate Student Groups

If you are at a university, you may want to seek the support of both undergraduate and graduate student representatives. Business school groups focused on social enterprise, entrepreneurship, and small business may be interested in your campaign. You may also want to reach out to law and other graduate student groups.

Dorms/Residence Halls/Fraternities/Sororities

Speak at dorm meetings or host a movie event in one of the dorm's lounges.

Newspaper/Campus Media

Newspapers can cover your events as news and editorialize about the issues, as well as the importance of getting involved in your campaign. If you know someone who writes for the paper, ask to meet with them over coffee and fill them in on what you are doing. If not, call the paper and ask for an assignment editor, then explain the event. (See more about doing media outreach on page 21 in Step 3).

You may also be able to make a formal presentation to the editorial board and ask them to write in favor of your issue. Make sure you are well prepared for these meetings. Never speculate on answers, just get back to them promptly with the answers to any questions you might not know. Other media outlets to approach include radio stations, television stations, and blogs. Some media outlets may be willing to co-sponsor an event; for example, a radio station can co-sponsor an awareness concert and broadcast it live.



Faculty and Staff

On many campuses, faculty members are an untapped resource with lots of potential. Professors can publicize your efforts in their classes, and hold lectures on the problem of unlimited corporate spending in elections or bring speakers who can.

Contact individual faculty and staff members who oppose unlimited corporate spending in elections. Inform them of the resolution and, if they are supportive, ask them to write a letter of support for your campaign. Bring the letters with you when you lobby your student government representatives.

¹Berman, Ari. "Why the Koch Brothers and ALEC don't want you to vote." Accessed on 17 Aug 2012: http://www.kochbrothersexposed.com/the_nation_why_the_koch_brothers_and_alec_don_t_want_you_to_vote.

