
Arvadans for Progressive Action

**Guide
For Starting a
Local
Progressive
Action
Group**

www.arvadansforprogressiveaction.org

Local Progressive Action Group Guide

This manual comes from Arvadans for Progressive Action (APA), an activist group formed in November of 2016 (you can guess our inspiration). This explains how we did it. You might find this useful in forming your own local progressive action group. You should tweak this to fit your own group and your own local community.

Set Up Your First Meeting

Work Out the Details

1. Pick a date, time, and place. Libraries often have meeting rooms for free. You might have connections that can hook you up with an HOA clubhouse or a room in a church for a reasonable fee.

Publicize

1. Send an invitation to your local friends, family, and acquaintances, and ask them to send invitations to their local friends and family, etc.
2. If you are on Nextdoor: set up a Nextdoor event, and make it viewable by all of the neighborhoods within your reach. See if you have friends on the other side of town who will also set up a Nextdoor event, so that the whole town can view the event.
3. Do you know anyone in the Democratic Party who can message local party activists about your event? If so, ask them to send out your event details.
4. Do you know anyone who can put up a website for your group? You will get a lot of new members from the community at large that way - and elected officials will take you much more seriously as you move forward. The website will become a great place to publicly state your positions and mission statement. Our also functions as a member sign up site. <http://arvadansforprogressiveaction.org/>.
5. If you are on Facebook: set up a Facebook event, and invite all of your local "friends." Bu don't be an insular Facebook group because you'll miss a lot of people in your community that way.

At the Meeting

1. Bring the following items:
 - a. Sign in sheets
 - b. Pens
 - c. Name tags
 - d. Blank pieces of paper for each attendee
 - e. If the room you're using doesn't have a writing board, then bring a big pad of paper to write on.
 - f. Snacks might also be a nice way to draw people in.
2. Have the room set up with tables, so that people will be sitting around the tables at the meeting.

3. Welcome everyone and thank them for coming. Tell them why you invited them here, and why you are inspired to start a group.
4. Ask them to discuss at their tables why they were inspired to come to this meeting, and to share with each other what their hopes and fears are.
5. Bring everybody back together and ask each table to share what issues they discussed. Write all of these ideas on the board/big piece of paper.
6. Take a look at everything that was written down and see if you can split it into categories. For example, you might choose to lump together “public lands” and “energy efficiency” under “Environment.” Ask people to rearrange into new groups, based on the topic that is most energizing to them.
7. Have these new groups discuss a simple action they can take to advance their issue(s). Tell them that they won’t be able to work on every single issue right away, so they may have to make tough decisions about what they choose to focus on. You can also give them action suggestions, such as setting up a meeting with their Congressperson, or organizing everyone to testify at the state capitol, or setting up a town hall for their City Council.
8. Groups should write the following on their paper:
 - a. The names and contact info of each person at the table
 - b. A point person to be the leader of their team. If this is intimidating or onerous, that group might want to identify two co-leaders.
 - c. Their planned action item(s).
 - d. When they will meet next.

Set Up Your Group Structure

The following is the structure of APA, but you may want to tweak things depending on your group. They may have other ideas, and it’s important to listen to the people who make up your group.

1. APA meets once monthly as a large group.
2. The “issues tables” that formed in the first meeting make our Action Teams. Each action team has a broad umbrella issue that they focus on, such as healthcare. These action teams also meet once monthly.
3. A person from each action team makes up the Leadership Team. There is also a chair and a secretary/treasurer. The Leadership Team also meets once monthly. They plan the large group APA meetings and discuss other decisions that come up for the group. They work out a structure for what decisions the Leadership Team should make, and what decisions they should poll their whole membership about.
4. APA is lucky to have a lawyer friend that wrote bylaws for us. This is not a necessity to be a successful group. If you are lucky enough to have the same resources, and you want to follow APA’s direction, APA is a Taxable Unincorporated Nonprofit Association (or a TUNA). This means:

Taxable: Any money that comes into our organization is taxable. You will have to check with the laws in your area for the threshold of money you can take in before you need to file a tax return.

Unincorporated: We have not filed any paperwork with the Secretary of State. So, we are essentially just a group of people who get together.

Nonprofit: We don't have shareholders and we don't make profits.

Association: We're an association in that we're a group of people who get together.

5. Once your group is solidified, you can discuss how you want to handle elections of your group's leadership. APA holds elections in the January of odd numbered years. We elect a leader of the large group, a secretary/treasurer, and leaders of each action team. These elections are a good opportunity to bring in fresh energy and ideas into your group.
6. Some items that we always put up to the membership for a vote (it takes 60% of the votes to endorse):
 - a. Candidates we endorse
 - b. Leadership of our group
 - c. Ballot issues we endorse

Some Additional Tips

1. Remember why you formed your group, and keep your values at the forefront.
2. Keep "actions" as a central part of your work. People want you to give them things to DO. APA does a weekly Call to Action, which appears on our website and is sent to members via email and also posted on our Facebook page. It focuses on local, state, and national level progressive actions.
3. Be flexible. Rules may have to change to ensure that your members' best ideas can be put to use.
4. Listen to your membership. They have good ideas, and will be more likely to volunteer if they are heard.
5. Try to focus on where you agree to act - rather than worry about where you all stand. APA is not a doctrinaire organization. We do not all need to agree on every issue in order to make progress. We strive to take effective action on principles where we do agree - and to table arguments over differences as a luxury for some less dangerous future time. <http://www.arvadansforprogressiveaction.org/index.php?page=About-Us>.
6. Know that conflicts will happen. Here are some things that we like to remind people:
 - a. Be respectful
 - b. Assume good intentions from one another
 - c. Own your own action, and be responsible for them.

Do your best to manage these conflicts, but know that you will not always be able to keep everybody happy. After you've tried your best, go back to focusing on pushing the group's values and encouraging people to engage in meaningful actions.

7. Make sure your meeting facilities are respectful of your members and guest speakers. The rooms should be quiet with good acoustics and/or audio equipment. And make sure your meetings respect your members' and speakers' time by starting on time and ending on time.

8. Host social gatherings. These might happen around holidays, or as an “after-party” after your monthly meetings. It’s important for people to get to know one another, and to have a deeper connection to the group.
9. Know that you will make mistakes. That’s okay. You’re forming a group a volunteers, so forgiveness for those volunteers and for yourself is essential.
10. Make sure to focus on other aspects of your life. Read for pleasure, exercise, spend time with family. And remind your members to do this as well. This is a marathon and not a sprint, so we all need to take breaks.
11. Connect with other groups and collaborate. Don’t reinvent the wheel if you don’t have to. If there is a certain issue that you want to take action on, look and see what other work is being done, and find out how you can help.
12. Have fun!