



Recruiting Founding Students

Helping Students Find Their Way In

Launching a Student Union or Alliance is not about attracting the largest possible group of students. It is about intentionally inviting students into a leadership community where they can experience belonging, build relationships, strengthen their leadership, and help shape the organization from its very beginning.

The founding students establish the culture future members will inherit.

SIX WAYS TO RECRUIT FOUNDING STUDENTS

1



Start with Personal Invitations

Personal invitations are more effective than schoolwide announcements. Students are more likely to attend when they know you see something in them.

Tell students exactly why you are inviting them.

- "I appreciate how you support other students."
- "I think your voice would strengthen this group."
- "I'd love for you to help us build something new."

2



Use the Relationships You Already Have

Ask the adults who know students well:

- counselors
- family resource coordinators
- teachers
- instructional assistants
- cultural liaisons
- office staff
- graduation coaches
- coaches

Who would benefit from this opportunity? Who demonstrates kindness, curiosity, responsibility, or leadership potential? Leadership is often recognized by adults who know students well.

3



Use School and Community Resources

Create multiple pathways for students to discover the organization.

- student information systems*
- family newsletters
- affinity newsletters
- community organizations
- Native youth centers
- Black parent organizations
- cultural organizations
- family engagement events
- school newsletters
- posters
- classroom visits
- student announcements

Use student information systems when appropriate and consistent with district policy and student privacy guidelines.

4



Invite Broadly. Let Students Decide.

Never assume which students would or would not be interested. Many students are:

- multiracial
- multicultural
- adopted
- reconnecting with their heritage
- exploring aspects of their identity
- not recognized by others as members of their community

Rather than deciding for students, create welcoming invitations that allow students to decide whether the organization is meaningful for them.

Students should never feel they must prove their identity to belong.
Beginning with an inclusive culture helps prevent identity gatekeeping and creates a stronger leadership community.

5



Start Smaller Than You Think

The first meeting does not need dozens of students. A small group of committed students can establish traditions, relationships, and culture that make future growth much easier.

Strong culture is more important than large attendance.

6



Grow Intentionally

Public announcements sometimes attract students who are interested in free food or missing class rather than participating in the organization's purpose.

Focus on building a welcoming community where students form the intended community feel comfortable returning. Once a healthy culture has been established, organizations naturally become stronger and more welcoming as they grow. Measure success by belonging, not just by attendance.



OPEN DECK INSIGHT

Students rarely join because they saw a flyer. They join because someone helped them believe they belonged. the first invitation often becomes the first step in a student's leadership journey.



BEGINNING WITH BELONGING

Every Student Union or Alliance should begin with a simple understanding: No student should ever feel they must prove their identity is personal and often complex. Students may come from multiracial families, multicultural backgrounds, be adopted, reconnecting with their heritage, questioning aspects of their identity, or simply have experiences that others cannot see. Build a culture where students welcome one another with curiosity, respect, and generosity.



BEFORE YOU BEGIN RECRUITING...

- With students in mind, where everyone is invited unless someone reaches out personally?
- What partnerships could help you connect with students and families?
- How will you ensure every invited student feels welcomed rather than evaluated?
- What message do you want students to remember after receiving your invitation?

