

# **BEYOND DISORIENTATION**



## **ORGANIZING YOUR NLG STUDENT CHAPTER**

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## *Getting Started*

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This manual is meant to aid Guild students who have already set up a campus chapter. If you're not quite there yet, see the [Checklist for Starting a New Chapter](#) which can be found in the student section of the Guild's website ([nlg.org](http://nlg.org)) and the [NLG Disorientation Handbook](#). The NLG Director of Research and Education, Traci Yoder is always available by phone or email to help you along the way: 212.679.5100 x12, [traci@nlg.org](mailto:traci@nlg.org). If you have any questions about this Guide or chapter organizing, contact me. I'd love to talk!

This manual was put together on request by former NLG Student Organizer Michel Martinez. Guild students work hard on their campuses and in their communities to raise awareness and drive social change, but sometimes need a hand organizing in a difficult environment while juggling multiple responsibilities. This piece is meant to be a brief, easily digested manual and reference guide that helps students and chapters develop as organizers and leaders. This is more a collection of tested best practices than a "how to ideally organize your chapter" or a theoretical exercise in leftist structures and movement building. As such, this manual pools some of the Guild's most successful ideas for fundraising, recruiting, publicizing, and more, into one document. It is by no means 100% comprehensive, but I hope you find it useful.

Don't have time to read this entire thing? Hit up the best practices section. It's the next page.

Is just one specific aspect of organizing tripping you up? Use the table of contents. If you're not finding your answer here, use the national student email list and contact Traci to troubleshoot.

Finally, if you have organizing ideas that have served you and your chapter well, please share! This guide should grow and change with experience, as we find and test creative new ways to make radical lawyering more prominent on law school campuses everywhere. Happy organizing, all!

# ***Best Practices***

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## **General Suggestions**

- Have a kick-off party to start the year right and then a farewell party to end it right
- Recruit constantly! Continually promote the Guild, your chapter, projects, and the idea of radical lawyering
- Find a good faculty advisor: Someone who's communicative, supportive, resourceful, and politically active
- Be self-reliant and self-motivated as a chapter, but open to and supportive of coalition projects and events
- Where possible, include grad and undergrad students (esp. pre-law society folks) to broaden your impact
- Carefully and realistically adapt the number of your activities to the size and resources of your chapter

## **Organizing, Networking, Recruiting**

- Build a strong team of core members, student allies, and supporters in the school's administration
- Encourage diversity among chapter officers; encourage people of color to take leadership positions
- Be sure your chapter is officially recognized by campus administration
- Openly recognize solid efforts and congratulate successes of members
- Maintain a calendar of tasks, current contacts list, and open communication
- Plan a social event: Bar Review, Coffee Hour, Potluck, Bowling, Hiking, Snowboard Trip, Movie Night
- Generate funds for chapter activities, e.g. sending members to the NLG convention
- Maintain a webpage or social media accounts: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram
- Submit an article about your work and chapter to *Guild Notes*, the national NLG Newsletter
- Interact with members and officers of other chapters through the email lists and social media

## **Providing Radical Lawyering & Public Interest Law Training, Education, Exposure**

- Set up a Radical Lawyering Public Interest Law Day or mini-conference
- Set up a mentorship program with the local Guild chapter or local radical lawyers
- Publicize internships, job openings, and fellowships with progressive organizations
- Organize Student Seminars, debates, awareness-weeks, symposia, or faculty research/clinical presentations
- Organize a Speaker Series around a theme, presenting practical and theoretical examinations of the issues
- Organize field trips to law offices, court arguments, government hearings, council sessions, etc.
- Organize a Critical Legal Studies Study Group
- Share the [NLG's Radical Law Student Manual](#)
- Invite NLG alumni/scholars or local chapter members to speak

## **Promoting Participation & Interaction with the NLG at large**

- Encourage people to become official members of the NLG and its committees—this assures that they receive, at minimum, the latest NLG news, job openings, opportunities for involvement, and publications
- Participate in related conferences and community workshops as a Guild delegate/in the name of the NLG
- Take leadership roles in the Guild at the local, regional, national, or committee level
- Check the [NLG Scholars](#) page for potential invitees; Invite local Guild board members to campus

## **Student Awards and Fellowships**

- NLG's *C.B. King Award* (AKA Law Student of the Year award; nominations accepted every May)
- NLG's [Haywood Burns Fellowships](#) (Summer Fellowship Program, applications due every January)
- Create a *Law Student* or *Activist of the Year* award for your own campus

## **Service Activities**

- As a group, fundraise for charity, volunteer in disaster areas, at women's shelters, or with Food Not Bombs
- Bring the NLG to local schools through Street Law, Know Your Rights, or Counter-Recruiting workshops

# Officers & Chapter Structure

To maximize your potential as a student organization and your impact on your campus and community, you will have to create a solid, dedicated team of members. Everyone in the chapter is responsible for accomplishing chapter goals and building a strong group. A chapter board is helpful, especially if your chapter is large or would like to do many things. To create a board, elect team members, use any past officers wisely, and design job descriptions that fit your crew. Don't get too hung up on the word "board" —it's a just word, and it doesn't have to mean all of the evil things it conjures. Think of the board as a team, and you are Team NLG.

Most school administrations require that student organizations have officers with defined names and responsibilities. Even if your chapter has no intention of taking this seriously and you want to have a very flat structure, you'll probably need people to volunteer to fill positions for the school's benefit (or for access to funds).

In the context of the NLG, it's often best to approach the "officers" idea in terms of "functions that need to be covered." You need someone to facilitate meetings, someone to take minutes and share them with the chapter, someone to coordinate with the National Office, your local NLG chapter, alumni, etc. Sometimes the non-hierarchical model is desired, and while laudable and workable with the right group, it can be fraught with peril; sometimes if everyone is responsible, no one is. This model can favor those who do not have to work, those without children, and people with time to burn. Over time, your chapter will consist of people with nothing else to do—not usually the most exciting and innovative bunch. The chapter may be small, divided, and unlikely to survive. Nurturing and growing a chapter, and developing a team of do-ers takes a lot of work; many chapters fail because "the leader left." Don't have leaders in the unitary-executive sense and don't let one person do everything!

If you're going the officer-route, use whatever titles you like; they are truly defined by their responsibilities. Officers should be 1Ls and 2Ls and terms should be one year. 2Ls know their way around and are on campus more often than the typical 3L. The role of 3Ls should be to offer support and guidance but not make everything happen. Otherwise, when they leave, the chapter flounders. That said, should the team have trouble, the previously successful 3Ls can help rally the chapter to cultivate a 1L successor group.

Typical student chapter roles/offices include:

- National Office contact(s), President, Chair/Co- Chairs, Queen Bee, etc.
- Faculty Advisor Contact
- Local NLG Liaison
- Secretary
- Treasurer
- Recruitment/Membership Coordinator
- Minister of Misinformation
- Paladin of Radical Lawyering
- Student Bar Association rep.
- Committee or Project Coordinator (as many as needed, e.g.: film series, newsletter, legal observing, street law)

**Chapter Contact(s).** Having at least one is pretty necessary for staying in touch with the NLG National Office, fellow student chapters, other national/local organizations, and for handling administrative functions on campus. This person can be referred to as President, Chancellor, Grand Puba, Prime Minister, chair or co-chair—whatever you like. The title is *not* important; it's all about the work that the person does, the jobs they perform. Multiple contacts are preferable for sharing responsibilities and maintaining contact when one of the others has a brief due, is on a case, a major project...you get the idea.

**Faculty Advisors** can be real assets, especially if they are Guild members and/or have been on your campus for a couple of years. They know the school, your allies, and have a good sense of what you can get

away with. A good faculty advisor will: ensure you know what the campus needs and helps you meet those requirements; serve as a critical link between the school's admin and your chapter; provide campus recognition for you and your efforts; and offer day-to-day guidance so your chapter grows and operates smoothly. Having someone that's in continuous, reliable contact with this person can be crucial. *ONE CRITICAL NOTE:* Tell the National Office who your advisor is so that if the chapter dies, future students have a lead when looking for an advisor, learning who the sympathetic professors are, or figuring out who to work with at school.

**Secretaries** are usually official record-keepers. They may: record all actions of the team and chapter business; maintain chapter documents, meeting minutes, project plans, and other items; serve as the official vote-tally person on things that require a vote; prep official chapter correspondence—internal and otherwise—as necessary.

**Treasurers** typically handle all of the financial issues of the chapter. This means they: collect/disburse funds (with team approval!); keep accurate and complete records of receipts and transactions; maintain any bank account; provide financial reports to the school and your NLG chapter regarding your budget and monies received/spent.

**Recruitment & Membership Coordinators** have obvious responsibilities. They usually: research, plan, and implement programs to recruit and build membership; keep current records of members and their chapter activities; report on the activities of the chapter and how growth/retention are going; continuously update the membership database/contact list; recruit constantly; work to greet, acquaint, and involve new members.

**Paladins of Radical Lawyering** are something like “Professional Development” officers, responsible for designing and arranging special programs to meet your chapter members’ professional needs. Put another way, they get events together that prove, *yes: it is possible to be a radical lawyer*. They may be the point person for something as major as a career fair or radical lawyer speaker series, but something as simple as arranging the occasional brown-bag with a radical lawyer or field trip to their office can be just as critical.

**Minister of Misinformation** is a fun way of saying publicity or communications coordinator. They may be responsible for spreading the word about events, putting out a chapter newsletter, communicating with other student organizations and campuses, handling the chapter’s social networking accounts and website or blog, writing articles for the national Guild publications, and creating promotional materials for chapter projects. If there is a local NLG chapter, this person may be the primary liaison.

**Elections** for next year’s officers should be carried out in April—or latest, early May—before the academic period ends and exams whip everyone into (understandably) dissociative blobs. This gives the outgoing team time to train new officers before summer break so that the chapter can resume activities straight away come Fall without a gap in planning or momentum. *If you don’t have officers*, you won’t have elections, but a year-end meeting to discuss the Fall—both events and how to divvy-up responsibilities—is a must.

**New Officer Orientation** helps make the transition from one year to another as smooth as possible. Review chapter goals and objectives. Discuss your strengths, weaknesses, and how you plan to address difficulties together to move the chapter forward. Have officers pair off to review their particular area of responsibility in more detail. Review the events of the past year, take care that all chapter files, contact information, office keys, passwords, and the like are transferred and in a safe place. Ensure that administrative tasks, current correspondence, and any pending business are taken care of. Previous officers should have at least one “sit-down”—if not a more formal orientation—with new officers to provide a general outline of how chapter affairs were conducted last year and possibilities for the coming term.

# Recruiting

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Keeping “quality over quantity” in mind, many members is better than a few members. If you’re paranoid about who might join, try not to be: right wingers do not want the letters N-L-G anywhere near their *Facebook* profile, let alone on their résumé.

## As you approach people for the first time about the Guild:

- Consider why YOU joined; share these reasons and your perspective on the Guild
- Download the “[Ten Things the NLG Can Do For You](#)” flyer from the student section of [nlg.org](#)
- Ask about their interests and hook into one; get a sense of who you're talking to, relate the NLG to their goals
- Be friendly, energetic, inviting, confident, intelligent, and knowledgeable about the Guild

## Learn the NLG's work, committees, and history:

- Have flyers ready and name drop every chance you get. You'll hook people enamored by famous attorneys and cases: William Kunstler? Arthur Kinoy? Lynne Stewart? Nuremberg? Watergate? The Red Scare?
- Hook people devoted to particular issues: civil liberties, anti-racism, gender equality, disability rights, and more!

## Use events, projects, and campaigns to involve people in concrete, immediate ways:

- "We are having a meeting on (date) to discuss (event/issue/project). You should come; it's right up your alley."
- "We are putting together a (event/project/social) and you should come/bring something/participate."
- "We are starting a (journal, clinic, training, etc.); you'd be a great asset. Plus you'll get experience doing (\_\_\_\_)."

## Target other orgs/events to meet new people and potential members:

- People of color
- First Amendment societies
- International or Environmental law society
- Immigrant rights groups
- Labor law junkies
- ACS, HRW, Amnesty, etc.

## Table and Participate in:

- Orientation
- Student Organizations Fair
- Admitted students events
- Co-sponsor events and have materials available
- Classroom announcements of meetings and events

Always have fact sheets and flyers on-hand, as well as sign-ups with plenty of pens to easily and orderly collect contact info and follow up.

## Some reasons for joining the Guild (tangible and intangible):

- 1) Social: sense of community and camaraderie
- 2) Moral: the desire to make a difference
- 3) Professional: for contacts and networking with the likeminded
- 4) Political/professional: help with actual cases and politicized/ethical career choices
- 5) Intellectual: a commitment to radical jurisprudence and/or critical legal studies
- 6) Personal: a connection to the NLG, knowledge of cases or projects, an appreciation for our past or present, or perhaps relationships with certain members

## Things to Consider:

- The NLG's image on your campus: Do you hate it? Like it? Love it? Should you flaunt it? Fix it? Tweak it? How the NLG is perceived on your campus can affect your chapter, your efforts, and impact your outreach approach.
- How well can you articulate the many ways that joining will improve a student's life? What's in it for them?

## Get people to stay involved through:

- Events
- Opportunities for participation/tasks
- Openness to All
- Fun
- Vocal appreciation for efforts and involvement
- Collaboratively setting goals/priorities, laying plans
- Delivering, as best you can, on the "benefits"/"reasons to join" part

Avoid burn-out and don't be overly demanding (esp. not right off the bat). Continually orient new members to the NLG. Encourage individuals to contact the National Office to talk about the NLG and reasons to be involved, to avoid feeling isolated, locally overwhelmed, or even just uninformed about the Guild at large.

# Event & Project Ideas

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More critical than figuring out which projects or events people would be interested in is learning which projects people will actually do. If someone comes up with an idea, encourage them to see it through and to recruit people from the chapter to make it happen. Don't start a project if there's no way it can be realized: if your chapter is too small, if the project will probably be too expensive, or if it will rely too heavily on outside resources or volunteers. Remember that managing a couple of projects or events well is a million times better than running a dozen separate projects poorly or leaving several half-done.

The list of projects to undertake can be a long one, but below is a taste to get you thinking. Create a committee for each project or event and make sure that folks report back during weekly or bi-weekly meetings or at least that often via email/group list.

**Debates**—These are fun to watch and easy to execute; plus, you can split the work with other student groups.

**Speakers**—Local NLGers, public interest lawyers, political figures, activists, direct action/know your rights trainers, community groups...the list of potential invitees is endless.

**Movies**—Almost anything will work for a screening, but of course the radical, historical, and political play best with the NLG. Have professors or legal professionals discuss their favorite movie or current work that relates to a film. Theme-nights keep it interesting, e.g. serve ice cream for a cold-war era film.

**Legal Observing**—Email the National Office for contacts, training guides, and other materials.

**Street Law, Know Your Rights, Counter-Recruiting**—There are many programs out there and there may be an official clinic at your school or schools you know of.

**Detainee Working Groups**—Observe immigration court proceedings.

**Student Bar and Administrative committees**—Schools often set up committees for faculty or dean searches, discipline, etc. This is your chance to have an impact on your school longterm, ensuring the school pursues women, people of color, people with disabilities, and others frequently discriminated against. Getting someone on the Student Bar may clinch funding for your efforts. Personal benefits to being on these committees include getting faculty and administration to know you which may lead to jobs, but at the least it doesn't hurt the résumé.

**Social events**—These are easy and can be revitalizing for both law students and public interest/NLG lawyers.

**Career Fair**—One with people and nonprofits doing radical legal work: better than one your school puts on!

**Legal work with NLG lawyers**—get in touch with a Guild member working on a case and chip in research, drafting, interviewing, and other invaluable services.

**Peer Mentors**—Match upper-classmen with incoming students. Run tours, show new folks the ropes, and minimize law school panic and even the blues. This is also a great way to get and keep people involved.

**Mentoring with NLG lawyers**—If there is a large and active Guild chapter nearby, inquire about starting a mentoring program. The National Office has contact info for local members.

**Newsletter**—Online templates make it increasingly simple to plug in content, print, and disseminate. Stuff them in hanging files, mailboxes, lockers, spread them on tables in the library, and share them at events.

**International Delegations**—The Guild runs these at least a couple times over a law student's school career.

Keep your eyes peeled for listserv announcements, share with your cohort, and get the school to pay!

If you're excited but unsure about a project, maximize your odds of success by talking with fellow student chapters, local NLG members, the National Office, and other logical sources about the nuts and bolts of how to best pursue it. There's no sense in spending lots of time trying to figure out how to do something that others have done pretty well. Seek out models, timelines, tips, and tricks.

# Publicity

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English historian John Acton once said, “Everything secret degenerates, even the administration of justice; nothing is safe that does not show how it can bear discussion and publicity.” Simply put, wrongs made public cannot persist.

If you’re like most Guild members, you came to law school to right wrongs—don’t forget that. The primary goal of the Guild is to bring about fundamental change in society, and there’s no changing the course of this nation without laying bare, for all to see, injustices perpetrated daily. Publicize your efforts well—your panels, your meetings, even your social events—bring attention to government failings and peoples struggles, and others will support you if not join you. Your successes make social change possible but ultimately hinge on adequately publicizing the issues and your efforts.

## General Suggestions

- Have a **chapter website**? Share with others and send the URL to the National Office to be linked from [nlg.org](http://nlg.org)
- 3 **purposes** of this work are: **PUBLICIZE** chapter events, **RECRUIT** members, **PROMOTE** radical lawyering
- Your **targets** are: first students; then faculty, alums, the NLG, and community groups with similar interests
- Use a **range of communication methods** to publicize the Guild and your events
- **Chalk and flier** the campus, bulletin boards, mailboxes, and local area with event and contact info
- Make **banners and posters** to put up—poster parties can be a fun way to get valuable work done
- Use the **internet**: e-mail, social networking sites, your chapter website or blog, and press releases.
- **Table** in hi-traffic areas, make classroom announcements, and mention your event at other groups’ events
- At the campus level, the very best way to get people involved and promote your work is basic **conversation**.
- EVERY flyer and announcement—spoken or written—must include **date, time, place, cost, and contact** info
- Email other Guild chapters and students, as well as the National Office so they can spread the word
- Befriend the **school paper/radio**: ask them for op-ed space, to plug your event, or cover your press conference
- Consider broader media coverage for some of your events: use newspapers, local access cable, radio, etc.
- **Write articles** about the group, your events and projects to enhance your image and reach more people—people want to be involved with groups that actually do things. Always, always, **ALWAYS take photographs!**
- Issue **press releases** on major actions and events to all contacts and National Office (templates abound!)
- Save and share any **press coverage** you receive (bonus: it may help you with future requests for funding)

## Event-Specific Suggestions

- Begin with a good topic, agenda, program, speaker, etc. No one attends events that sound lame at the outset, but they might attend an event they wouldn’t otherwise if the title and description are enticing.
- **Brainstorm** with your chapter to develop a long list of **provocative topics** and **desirable speakers**, and solicit feedback from fellow students and potential co-sponsors to learn what people are likely to attend
- See the NLG Scholars page online and ask the National Office for local NLG speakers and other Guild members practicing law that interests you
- Many people join organizations for professional **development** and to advance their **careers**: offer programs on **jobs**, the legal field, exploring alternative careers, etc. and publicize the events as **rare opportunities**.
- Get other student organizations to plug your event to their membership; perhaps ask them to co-sponsor.
- Advertise that you will **serve food**, or at least provide light refreshments: food has endless potential for turning people out and enhancing the reception of a speaker or event.
- Design and deliver solid messages about the upcoming program that include: an engaging **program title** with a brief, interesting **description of the topic**, and a pithy **guest-bio** or set of bios.



# Fundraising

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- **HOUSE PARTY:** Cheap, easy, fun.
- **Bar Review, movie night,** etc.: an excuse to get together and just hang out, but this time, charge to get in
- **Brown Bag Challenge:** Invite people to a panel or discussion, perhaps on capitalism, hunger, or poverty law. Ask them to donate what they would spend on lunch and bring their lunch instead for one day.
- **Hunger Banquet:** Akin to the Brown Bag Challenge, but more posh, where attendees pay a premium to watch a program or panel and be served empty plates—a reminder that millions go hungry every day.
- **Benefit Concerts, shows:** Ask "progressive" acts, (i.e. bands, poets, performance artists) in your area, to do a freebie and let the NLG have the proceeds/door fee. Raise money through ticket sales.
- **Bake Sale:** I'll assume no explanation is necessary.
- **Ask.** The Student Bar Association/Student Government usually has tons of money. Writing a bill for funding and bringing it before your student government is a relatively easy way to get some. Point out the ways the event or activity will help other student organizations develop as well as how it may bring (positive) attention to the school.
- **Ask** faculty or alums. Sometimes you'll find they don't have money to give themselves, but are willing to help you get money from the school for a particular event. Approach them early and often.
- **Ask** community groups by offering an opportunity to get the word out about their work, talk about an on-going campaign, or just set up a table with their info in exchange for a small fee. And we mean SMALL.
- **Tournaments** in Kickball, Basketball, Baseball, Ultimate Frisbee, Volleyball, Flag Football, Softball, Cricket, Badminton, Capture the Flag, etc.: Have an entry fee for teams—other student organizations?—and set up a tourney bracket. The prizes are fun and bragging rights. You can do the same with things like a Jump Rope or Dance or Hula Hoop-a-Thon, where individuals or teams pay a fee to enter. Encourage competition among student groups—who cares more about social justice?
- **Human Chess Tourney:** Have enough people to be the pieces and allow others to pay to play. Have an entry fee for individuals and/or teams and set up a bracket.
- **Car Bash:** people pay to hit a beat up an old car to relieve exam stress. Yes, seriously.
- **Book/Garage/Rummage Sales:** collect used items and then have a big sale. When will you ever need that Contracts book again? Your *Nutshells* and *Emmanuels* and all those binders?
- **Community Bingo night:** See if a local community center or church will let you collect a portion of a night's take in exchange for you staffing the event. Have a donation box, signs, and make an announcement.
- **Letter writing:** Prepare a draft letter asking deans, local NLG, alums, etc. for money
- **Car wash:** hit up a heavily trafficked gas station or street-visible church or school parking lot for space.
- **Karaoke Competitions:** Set this up at a local bar and charge an entry fee for the contest.
- **Button, T-shirt Sales:** Make your own or buy some buttons with a desirable logo on them—ones people can't get at the bookstore. Charge at least double what they cost to buy or make (button-makers and supplies are widely available for the diy approach—I highly recommend this as a group project AND a fundraiser!)
- **Student/Faculty Talent Show:** Host a student/faculty talent show and charge admission.
- **Art Show:** ask friends, artists, and local businesses to donate work for you to show'n'sell (auction or off-the-wall). If you can get a political theme going, that's a bonus.
- Ask businesses to **match fundraising totals.** Arrange all match-details beforehand. You could ask local restaurants to **donate food** for an event instead of purchasing it.

# What Works: Ideas from Fellow Guild Members

## EVENT IDEAS

We have food at all events. Progressive Lawyering Day is a big event every Fall...a totally student-run conference that is one Saturday full of workshops, panels, a keynote speaker and a reception. We try to make it open to activists, allies, and community members and not too bourgeois. --Golden Gate University

## RECRUITING

We do lots of different things that get people involved and interested: **Know Your Rights/LO trainings**; our **Radical Lawyer Speaker Series**; we have lawyers come in, talk about their work, and recruit volunteers.

--Lewis and Clark

We attract new members with Disorientation at beginning of the year, events throughout the semester, and are starting to do more targeted **mentoring in the city with practicing attorneys**/students as well as with 2-3Ls and 1Ls. We reach out with event programming, but not with an eye toward recruitment--usually we're just trying to get people to come out for events. Our chapter is really young and just building a foundation, focusing on building leadership with a solid core of 10 or so very active members.

--Loyola--New Orleans

We table with several members and Disorientation guides and candy and other information at the 1L orientation (with a sign up sheet for the email list). We then **organize a meet and greet with local NLG attorneys** early in the fall semester (with that sign up sheet).

--University of Pittsburgh Law

The best way we have brought people to our events is to **co-host with more established groups** and groups with large membership (like Balsa, ULSCC, etc).

--UPenn

In a very basic way, I think 2 ways that BLS has been able to attract some new members this year are through (1) **good food**, and (2) **provocatively titled events and fliers**. We blow a lot of our SBA budget on food from a Middle Eastern market that has really amazing falafel, hummus, etc. Although it's more expensive than pizza, it gets people in the door, especially when our flyers advertising our events sometimes feature pictures of the falafel! Corny, I know, but a few people have told me that they showed up to meetings because they were sick of pizza lunches.

--Brooklyn Law School

I attended a **training** sponsored by another NLG chapter. Then, I invited the trainer to do the training at my school, and I invited other chapters to attend. That was pretty fun.

--Cardozo

To attract new members, we table during student orgs tabling week. We try to put useful propaganda on our designated **bulletin board space** (e.g. a flyer of famous NLG cases/members/clients), and we invite people to our chapter's *Facebook* group. The student org fair tends to attract mostly 1Ls, while the *Facebook* tactic tends to involve 2-3Ls. The student orgs fair usually brings people in to our beginning-of-the year **kickoff meeting**, which leaves them helpless in the face of our recruitment pitch. During the year, we try to attract people by having interesting programs.

--Case Western

The best opportunity for recruitment is **orientation week**: we hold an early first meeting, and invite NLG Board members to speak about their work. We try to get students quickly matched with an attorney mentor, and take students on a **walking tour** to introduce them to the area and share info about the Guild. Golden Gate has a peer mentor program where they meet new 1Ls and bring them to NLG events. They also show the Abby Ginzberg film about the NLG's history [buy/borrow from the National Office]. Getting students involved in National/local **Guild committees** is helpful, as is inviting students to help plan events like *Progressive Lawyering Day*.

--NLG-SF

Participate in the **school's orientation**. Find out when it is and who is in charge; it is often a multi-day event. **Offer to help** with it in as many ways as possible: 2 and 3Ls can lead small groups where you give pointers or answer questions about the school. Offer to lead tours of the area, pointing out important things that students need to know: best vegan burrito, the cheapest beer, quickest route to the train, those sorts of things. Do not miss the additional orientation events set up for **people of color**, and find ways to participate—the NLG, if it's history is any indication, is THE place for non-white lawyers. Talk to the TUPOCC, [tupocc@gmail.com](mailto:tupocc@gmail.com), co-chairs for ideas.

Most schools set a time for student groups table during orientation. **YOU MUST BE THERE IN ALL NLG GLORY: lots of literature, balloons, cookies, candy**, and as many 3Ls and alums as possible—new students want to know they are not making a mistake. If you don't have a **banner**, make one. Have **Legal Observer hats** on the table; they start conversations. Most importantly you need **sign - up sheets**. Multiple, so people don't have to wait to sign it. NLG membership applications are good, too. You need to have lots of **DisOrientation Manuals** from the National Office—order them early—and a flyer explaining some of the benefits of NLG involvement. Have a list of projects or event ideas ready, and a flyer for the **first meeting**. Repeatedly announce the first meeting date, time, and location—food included. Lastly, wear your NLG tees or buttons.

--Steve Gotzler, Philadelphia NLG

**For 1Ls** we focus on pushing the academics. We share outlines and used books and study supplements. **For 2Ls**, our draw is probably more the panels and events about interesting areas of the law. **For 3Ls**, same, except probably more about job and career strategies. We always rely primarily on the social justice and anti-racist work we do to draw interested folks. **Co-sponsoring** with other groups on campus also helps to attract membership. Planning great, radical, and interesting events and getting people to sign onto our email list and stay updated are the most effective ways of ensuring chapter success. **Food**. Good film showings. *Justice is a Constant Struggle*, the movie about NLG history, inspires students to get involved.

--Golden Gate University

## CHAPTER MANAGEMENT

**Office**. It's a good idea to team up with the ACLU, Equal Justice, and the OutLaw chapters. Use the office to hold chapter stuff, keep the door open, and have someone there whenever possible. Get a fridge, keep it stocked, and make it a hang out place. This will make it easier to actually get Guild work done. It can help to make the Guild fun. Your office/chapter needs a computer that has one essential item, always up-to-date and backed up. It needs a...**Database**. You must collect a list of Guild alumni. Every year add the names of your new members to the database and update everyone's contact information as necessary. Start NOW. There will be times when you need money to go the annual NLG convention, to Cuba, or Venezuela or a demo or whatever. You can use the list to get people to come to the annual public interest auction. And last but not least, these may be good leads for jobs.

--Steve Gotzler, Philly-NLG

## LEADERSHIP, DECISION-MAKING, & CHAPTER STRUCTURE

We use **consensus process always**, although not always formal. We try to stick to our positions and delegate tasks, but often it seems a few people do most of the work. By keeping our organization **active and open**, we attract more students to get involved. We don't have a president and we are not a hierarchical organization. Folks that have an idea generally take leading roles in making events happen and officers take responsibility for making sure logistics and all are together.

We strive to make our decisions non-hierarchically and try not to reproduce oppressive tendencies of our society in our organizational workings. We expressly adopted the Alabama Manifesto (the document marking the formation of TUPOCC and a call for NLG to work on becoming an anti-racist org), committing ourselves to work on becoming a truly anti-racist organization. We **ally ourselves with student of color and queer orgs** on campus and co-sponsor events.

--Golden Gate University

# *Dos & Don'ts of Student Chapter Organizing*

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*by Holmes Rackleff of Tulane NLG*

In the Fall of 2006, a small group of law students started a new a chapter of the NLG at Tulane University School of Law. Tulane NLG has participated in local and national activism events, volunteered in the New Orleans community as law clerks and legal observers, and hosted speakers, luncheons, and tabling events on campus. With a large email list but an active group of only nine, we have learned a lot about what works and what doesn't work for a small campus chapter. Here's a brief list of do's and don't from our experience.

**Do: Recruit Heavily**

**Don't: Rely on Flyers and Internet Bulletins for Member Recruiting**

We participated in our first recruiting event of the school year, the information fair, along with every other law society and every journal at Tulane. While we did generate interest there, it is hard to stand out at these types of events. We went one step further by announcing our meetings in 1L classes by simply emailing the professors and letting them know we'd be making a brief announcement before class, then showing up and speaking briefly to the students about the purpose of our NLG chapter and the time and place of our first meeting. In this way we grew our membership from about 6 to 26 members.

**Do: Use Few Members to Get Lots of Things Done**

**Don't: Get Discouraged Because You Don't Have Enough Members**

As the school year wore on, our numbers dropped significantly. Don't panic if you lose members early on, this happens. 1Ls tend to sign up for more events and groups than they really have time for and disappear from group rosters after the first two weeks of law school reading assignments. We managed to run the chapter with very few students. We always had plenty of people show up for our events on and off-campus as long as they were well publicized.

**Do: Encourage Members to Do the Work They Enjoy**

**Don't: Neglect to Offer Structure When Tasks Aren't Completed**

During the first year of our chapter officer positions were title only. Our approach was for each person to spearhead a project and for all the members to volunteer for each other. Everyone shared the work and came to the group with their own project in mind. We tabled for homeless issues, organized a film festival, did awareness work for Student Day Against the Death Penalty (SDADP), worked every Saturday at Common Ground Legal, and sent representatives to the Fall 2006 NLG conference.

The second year brought some growing pains. As the new chapter President, I had an aversion to meetings and tried to run the chapter in such a way that people had total freedom to plan whatever they wanted. That turned out to be a mistake. Many of our early recruits were hoping for greater structure and they went to more stratified law societies on campus as a result. We did have a very successful Fall 2007 event; we sent a group of legal observers to Jena, Louisiana for a large demonstration in support of the Jena Six.

Unfortunately, some of our other efforts failed for lack of volunteers.

In the Spring of 2008 we introduced more structure by adding extra meetings, delegating specific tasks to members at the meetings, and following up in-between. We managed to pull off several events in a short time frame, and everyone pitched in. We ended the year with nine active members, all of whom had pro bono commitments outside of school and still participated in a week of tabling for SDADP, a luncheon exoneree/speaker event for SDADP, an evening speaker event, and an election and training of new officers for the upcoming school year.

### **Do: Create Officer Positions for 1L and 2L Students**

#### **Don't: Succumb to Brain Drain**

We decided in the first year that all of our officer positions should be held by 1L and 2L students so that there will always be 3Ls around who have served in those positions to answer questions and offer guidance. President and Treasurer are the only officer positions held by 2Ls, every other position is reserved for our incoming students.

In the Spring of 2008 we began officer training for the incoming Fall President and Treasurer. The training consists of a nuts and bolts document that describes the paperwork process for every type of event on and off-campus, and a walk-through of all the administrative offices where we have to file and pick up contracts, documents, receipts and payments. We do it because it takes a long time to learn who-does-what, what-goes-where, when-to-file, etc, and all that bureaucratic red tape is really non-intuitive. It took our first members a long time to learn, and we want an easier chain of information to continue after we're gone.

If you're trying to start an NLG chapter at your school, keep it up! We at Tulane University School of Law started and sustained an active NLG chapter with only a few dedicated people. Our school is small and only a small percentage of its students seek public-interest law careers, but we have consistently been able to stay involved in local activism and the NLG community.

### **Greatest Hits: Activities from Tulane NLG's 2007-2008 School Year**

- Trained and Transported Jena Six Legal Observers
- Attended National NLG Conference
- One Week of Tabling for the Student Day Against the Death Penalty
- Death Row / Life Imprisonment Exoneree Luncheon
- Speaker James Yee, Former Muslim Army Chaplain at Guantanamo Bay, Exonerated of False Espionage Charges by the Army

# Organizing Calendar

This calendar can guide you as you plan for an effective year organizing your chapter. The events need not happen in exactly this order or exactly this way; indeed, some events may not happen at all and plenty of things not listed would be great things to do! Definitely modify this to fit your school's academic calendar as well as chapter member interests and availability. See the next page for additional details related to items marked with an asterisk.

## **June/July:**

- New officers take-up positions/responsibilities
- Order *Disorientation Handbooks* from NLG Student Organizer ([traci@nlg.org](mailto:traci@nlg.org))
- Over at least email, brainstorm about fall events\*
- Make plans to table at/participate in 1L Orientation, Student Organizations' Fairs, etc.

## **August**

- Plan/hold first meeting; write & disseminate meeting agenda at least 1-week prior
- Plan "kick-off" event
- Make plans to attend NLG National Convention
- Where possible, contact local NLG chapter & discuss coordinating event, meeting, social\*

## **September:**

- Annual "Kick-Off" Event\*
- First monthly chapter meeting\*
- Flesh out projects & committee ideas
- Set up an event calendar for the school year
- Hold a membership drive\*
- Finalize committee assignments
- Panels, socials, debates, & other event(s)
- Register, finalize plans for NLG Convention

## **October/November:**

- Event(s)
- Monthly chapter meeting
- NLG National Convention\*

## **December:** Event(s)

- Semester-ending social
- Monthly chapter meeting
- Discuss ideas for coming semester

## **January:**

- Second Major Recruitment Period
- Hold another kick-off event; participate in any student organizations' fairs/orientations
- Monthly chapter meeting
- Review, re-propose semester events
- Begin planning participation in NLG regional conferences\*

## **February:**

- Plan *SWAMI* events\*
- Event(s)
- Monthly chapter meeting

## **March:**

- SWAMI*: Student Week Against Mass Incarceration
- Monthly chapter meeting
- NLG Regional Conferences

## **March/April**

- NLG Regional Conferences
- Election of new officers\*
- Contact National Student Organizer w/ new officers' contact information
- Complete Student Chapter Survey, submit online or via email to Student Organizer\*

## **April:**

- Recognition of outgoing chapter officers
- Current officers orient their successors\*
- Submit new officers' contact information to Student Organizer at NLG National Office
- Monthly chapter meeting
- Establish goals for coming chapter year
- Preparation of preliminary agenda for coming year's membership, meetings, & activities
- Preliminary discussion of recruitment efforts, event ideas
- Handle administrative tasks with school offices: submit budget, necessary paperwork, faculty advisor details, etc.

## **May/June:**

- Finalize April items
- Exams, Commencement
- Farewell party\*

## Additional notes on certain calendar events

**Brainstorm about fall.** Over email, begin discussing how you'll start the year off: who would make a great speaker? Is there an issue you'd like to devote yourselves to this term or school year? To generate interest & meet 1Ls, would a local area tour or party be a good idea? Should you host joint meetings with the local NLG chapter or other student organizations? Discuss a budget if you have to file one—and have not already—with the school (a sample is online in the student section of [nlg.org](http://nlg.org)). Running ideas by your chapter's faculty advisor could be helpful.

**Working with Local Chapters.** Local chapters can be a great source of support—political, professional, & even financial—so don't hesitate to reach out to them. Contact the Student Organizer at the National Office if you're unaware of local NLG members or a full-fledged chapter.

**Kick-off Events.** This can be anything from a party, a BBQ, a panel, a speaker, a get-together with the local NLG chapter, or a big NLG Disorientation. Your chapter can go solo, or coordinate with NLG chapters at other schools nearby. What's important is that you go all-out on advertising & maximize attendance. The purpose of this event is to recruit new members; advertise it heavily at orientation & subsequent events—see the PUBLICITY section of this guide.

**Monthly Meetings** are a must, if not as a whole chapter, then at least all the officers. They should be short, & if you feel thin on participation or ideas, consider teaming up with another org for a project and make the meeting about that. Since everyone's pretty busy & meetings can feel like time-wasted, you'll have a hard time getting people to come. Combat this by promising—& delivering—short meetings that stick to an agenda (preferably one you've sent out beforehand). Put time limits on each issue up for discussion. Form subcommittees or agree to chat over email about things that need more time to flesh-out or come to consensus on. Having refreshments may up attendance, & people can socialize after if they like.

**Membership Drive.** All NLG law students members also need to be members of the national organization either through the National Office or through their local chapter. Early in the semester, encourage people to pay their membership dues to be added to the national student email list, be eligible for NLG fellowships, and to support the Guild's mission and work! For information on membership, see [nlg.org/join](http://nlg.org/join) or email Director of Membership Lisa Drapkin at [membership@nlg.org](mailto:membership@nlg.org).

**NLG National Convention!** This takes place every year, typically in late October. Apply to your school's administration for travel funding well in advance so your chapter achieves maximum attendance. Do the same of your local NLG chapter if you have one.

**NLG Regional Conferences:** Every year, each NLG region plans a local convention to bring together the chapters in that area. NLG students are encouraged to attend and participate in these conferences! Apply for travel funding when you make your annual budgets.

**SWAMI (aka Student Day Against Mass Incarceration).** This is a nationally organized action that every student chapter is invited to participate in every year. This takes place during the first week of March and marks the Guild's annual nationwide call for an end to the prison-industrial complex. The National Office puts together a packet of informational and organizing resources available for download on the website in late January. The packet highlights recent developments & issues in mass incarceration policy, & helps chapters figure out how they might raise awareness about ongoing abuses, & participate in the week of actions.

**Student Chapter Survey.** Every year, the National Office sets up a survey for student chapters to fill out detailing their activities, interests, struggles, successes, questions, needs, & basic statistics. This helps the Student Organizer & the Guild at large assess how its student chapters are doing & how they might best support their work. Completing the survey is critical to building the Guild & is greatly appreciated!

**Election of officers.** See the OFFICERS & CHAPTER STRUCTURE section of this guide. Election Meetings are normally held at the end of each school year (often specified in the bylaws) & are open to the entire chapter membership. If your chapter is just starting up, hold this meeting ASAP.

**Officer Orientation.** If officers are elected, the chapter—or in lieu of everyone, at least the previous officers—should do a new officer orientation. See the OFFICERS & CHAPTER STRUCTURE section.

Contact the National Office with new officers' info: see that someone—the chapter-equivalent of a “secretary” or any other member—notifies the Student Organizer of the name, e-mail address, & grad year of each officer, or, at minimum, the chapter's new National Office contacts.

**Farewell Party.** Use this as an opportunity to bid farewell to the graduating students, give awards, take photos of everyone or the graduating class & enjoy some great food, company, & conversation. It's also a great chance for students—graduates, 1Ls, & 2Ls—to learn about the various places where the graduating class is going & where others will spend their summers working or volunteering.