

The Medical Cannabis Advocate's Handbook

**STARTING AN
ASA CHAPTER**

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I WHY AN ASA CHAPTER?

A. What does a great chapter look like?

Launching an ASA chapter is a great way to formally bring together like-minded activists in your community to work together toward ensuring safe access to medical cannabis. ASA chapters are part of a national network of ASA activists and staff who work together on a regular basis to achieve shared goals.

A great ASA chapter brings together vibrant activists in an environment of mutual respect, shared responsibility, and constructive political activism and creates a space for new advocates to plug in to the movement. The ideal ASA chapter is networked into the larger community and is a constructive voice for patients and providers of medical cannabis.

The best ASA chapters combine the art of conversation with skilled activism. They are considered by elected officials to be a principled voice and smart resource for community leaders who are interested in addressing the question of medical cannabis.

B. Focus on Medical Cannabis

ASA is solely focused on expanding safe access to medical cannabis. This means that ASA does not have a position for or against legalization of cannabis for non-medical purposes or on related issues, such as incarceration or sentencing standards for recreational drug use.

This also means that ASA chapters are not permitted to campaign for or against drug legalization measures or proposals. ASA and its chapters do not have a stand on cannabis legalization or laws related to other controlled substances.

C. Nonpartisan

ASA and its chapters cannot endorse candidates for elected office. This would be a viola-

tion of the organization's nonpartisan and nonprofit status. ASA and its chapters are also not allowed to use funds to make contributions to candidates' political campaigns.

However, it is acceptable—and highly encouraged—to seek candidates' positions on medical cannabis issues. It is also highly encouraged to invite political candidates to chapter meetings or even host a meet and greet with candidates so they can get to know patients and ASA members in their community.

In addition, it is perfectly legal for ASA chapters to campaign for or against ballot initiatives, referenda, state constitutional amendments, bond measures, or similar measures. Any position that an ASA chapter takes should be in line with the ASA organization's focus on expanding safe access to medical cannabis. ASA chapters cannot take stands for or against efforts to legalize cannabis outside of a medical scope.

D. ASA chapters are NOT:

- One person
- Groups that dispense medication
- Groups that are linked to an individual medical cannabis provider
- Commercial entities or groups that make commercial endorsements or promotions

E. ASA resources and support

ASA chapters can depend on ASA for support, guidance, and encouragement. We want to provide you with the materials and tactical guidance to help you succeed. We also want to get you networked into our national community of chapter leader ASA activists.

Specifically, here are some of the resources ASA can provide as you build and maintain your chapter:

1. Online materials and support for newly forming chapters

2. Nationwide chapter leader conference calls
3. E-mail updates on local, state, and national ASA issues
4. Phone-based trainings on lobbying, media, action planning, civil disobedience, and strategy
5. Materials online:
Start-up toolkits including this organizing handbook, a media manual, citizen lobbying handbook, medical cannabis fact sheets, and sampling of ASA literature
6. Space on the ASA national website to post local contact information
7. Occasional opportunities to publicize your chapter's efforts via e-mail to ASA's large network of online activists

F. What makes a good chapter leader?

A good chapter leader sets the tone for respectful communication, fiscal integrity, and transparency in decisions and plans. Chapter members have a clear sense of how chapter funds are spent, how chapter decisions are made, and why they are all valued members of a team.

In addition, a good chapter leader keeps up with ASA alerts/actions, participates in national chapter conference calls, regularly submits new chapter sign-ups and memberships to ASA, and maintains written records of chapter income, expenses, and assets.

II HOW DO I GET STARTED?

A. Check to see if there is already an ASA chapter in your community

With ASA chapters all over the country, it is worth taking a look online to see if there is already an ASA chapter in your community. To do so, go to <http://www.americansforsafeaccess.org> and click on "Community." Within that section is a list of all ASA chapters, affiliates, and other regional contacts nationwide.

B. Email action@safeaccessnow.org to apply to start an ASA chapter.

Send us details about your region, goals, and the people who are interested in participating.

C. Wait for our feedback

ASA approves requests to start new chapters based on a careful evaluation of the goals, accomplishments, skills, and enthusiasm of those involved. We want to make sure that our new chapters have the best guarantee of success, which means that we want to encourage committed local activists with a track record of collaborative work to apply.

We promise to give your application full consideration, but we can't promise that every single application to start a chapter is automatically approved.

If you want to follow up on your application, please send an e-mail to action@AmericansforSafeAccess.org.

III CHAPTER REQUIREMENTS

- 10 ASA members who have made an annual membership contribution to the national ASA organization. Standard contributions are \$35 per person, and there is a sliding scale for low-income contributors. The minimum individual contribution is \$10. To confirm that you have met this requirement, email action@safeaccessnow.org.
- Chapter Coordinating Committee: At least five members, including the Chapter Chair and any Vice Chairs.
- A Chapter Chair, elected by the full chapter.
- If needed, one or more Chapter Vice Chairs, depending on the chapter's needs. Vice Chairs are also elected by the full chapter and are part of the chapter coordinating committee.
- A roster of meeting attendees. To participate in annual chapter elections, one must be a "chapter member" and attend at least two chapter meetings a year. The chapter election meeting is not included in this "two meetings" attendance requirement.
- Meetings that are at least monthly, publicized, and open to the public.

- A liaison between ASA and your chapter.

10 ASA Members:

To start an ASA chapter, you need to bring together 10 ASA members who have made a financial contribution to ASA. ASA wants to ensure that our chapters adequately represent groups of ASA members in the communities where they are launched.

Chapter Coordinating Committee:

The Chapter Coordinating Committee is the core leadership group of your chapter. These are the folks who communicate between chapter meetings and help streamline the process of running a good ASA chapter. Not every chapter member may want to deal with every detail of running an effective ASA chapter. This is the group of people that makes sure that chapter meetings are planned and that nitty-gritty decisions get made.

The Chapter Coordinating Committee is elected by the full chapter and must be at least five people. These five people would include the chair and any vice chair positions. Some of our best ASA chapters organize their Coordinating Committee with no single leader and make all decisions by consensus. If there is no single leader, one of the Coordinating Committee members should act as the ASA liaison.

Some chapters are on the smaller side of things—as few as 10 members total. If you have a small chapter, the Coordinating Committee can simply be the entire chapter.

Why is a Chapter Coordinating Committee useful? As your ASA chapter grows, you could eventually find yourself with as many as 25, 50, or more people attending your monthly meetings. It is important to have a core group that can communicate with each other and help keep the larger chapter running smoothly. Responsibilities may include coordinating local volunteer positions, creating the agenda, email alerts, announcements, reminders, etc.

Chapter Chair

The full chapter should also elect a Chapter Chair who is the official coordinator of the chapter. Please note that the Chair should not make decisions without the approval of the Chapter Coordinating Committee. The Chair position should be viewed as the spokesperson for the group for the chapter, not a "boss."

Vice Chairs

The full chapter can also elect any Vice Chairs that the group agrees are necessary. Vice Chairs could include people focused on fundraising, chapter finances, community outreach, or even specific campaigns. The Chapter Chair and any Vice Chairs are part of the coordinating committee.

Consensus-Based / No leader

Some of our best ASA chapters organize their Coordinating Committee with no single leader and make all decisions by consensus. We highly recommend you implement this structure. One of the Coordinating Committee members should act as the ASA liaison when using this leadership model.

Chapter Members

One must be a Chapter Member to vote in annual chapter elections. To be a voting Chapter Member, one must attend at least two chapter meetings in the previous year, not including the annual chapter elections. The Chapter Coordinating Committee should track chapter membership with a monthly sign-up sheet for all meeting attendees.

ELECTIONS

Within a year of a chapter's launch, the Chapter Coordinating Committee should hold elections in which the whole ASA Chapter membership participates. ASA Chapter elections should be held for the Chair, any Vice Chair positions, and remaining Chapter Coordinating Committee seats, or for the members of the Coordinating Committee if following the No Leader Consensus model.

IV CHAPTER DECISION-MAKING

A. Consensus:

Both the Chapter Coordinating Committee and the full chapter should strive to make decisions through a process of consensus. Sometimes, relying on a majority vote is inevitable. However, the healthiest and strongest chapters arrive at their decisions through a process that is inclusive of the collective wisdom of the membership.

B. Quorum:

For a Chapter Coordinating Committee to make decisions, there must be a quorum present. A quorum is defined as a majority. That means that if your Chapter Coordinating Committee has five members, at least three must be present to make any decisions.

C. Conflict resolution:

As a rule of thumb, conflicts are best resolved in person. E-mail disputes rarely resolve peacefully, primarily because it is easy to read whatever emotion one wants into a text-based message. Only by sitting in front of somebody is it truly possible to emotionally understand where that person is coming from and how they are feeling.

D. Dealing with problematic individuals and leaders

Ideally, interpersonal conflicts with individuals who demonstrate problematic behavior patterns can be addressed through direct conversation, without involving the entire group. Sometimes, however, there are "problem" individuals whose behavior is repeatedly disruptive to the productive functioning of an ASA Chapter.

Examples of such behavior can include repeated unilateral decision-making, extreme argumentativeness, ongoing insults, or even threats.

In such cases, it may be necessary to remove a chapter member from the chapter entirely. Doing so requires a vote by two thirds of the entire Chapter Coordinating Committee. Please note that the two thirds vote must

include all members of the Chapter Coordinating Committee. This means that a five person Chapter Coordinating Committee would need at least four people to vote to expel a chapter member.

When removing someone from the chapter, the Chapter Coordinating Committee should be clear with the individual as to what standards of behavior were violated. The Chapter Coordinating Committee should also provide a written notice articulating the behaviors in question and why those behaviors were unworkable.

Such a vote must not be taken over e-mail. The vote must also be documented and provided to the national ASA staff: action@AmericansforSafeAccess.org.

E. ASA Authority and Chapter disputes

ASA reserves the right to disband or otherwise intervene in ASA Chapter affairs. ASA staff prefer not to engage in such efforts, and our goal is to support ASA chapters as best we can.

ASA staff intervention or disbanding of chapters may occur in serious situations that include a breakdown of chapter leadership, irreconcilable chapter disputes, or chapter actions that violate the standards and policies outlined in this manual.

ASA generally commits to giving a chapter advance warning before intervening or disbanding the chapter. Advanced warning can include specific steps the chapter can take to address a specific problem and a timeline to do so. In extreme cases, ASA may make a unilateral decision without providing advance warning.

If an ASA chapter or individual disagrees with an ASA decision or warning, the chapter or chapter leaders may request a review by the ASA Associate Director or Executive Director. Such a review may be requested by phone or email. The decision of the Executive Director is final in these cases.

V ONGOING CHAPTER REQUIREMENTS

A. Community level:

Community Responsiveness

ASA Chapters have a primary goal of supporting medical cannabis patients and advocating for safe access to medical cannabis in the communities where they exist. This means that being responsive to the community is important.

At a minimum, ASA Chapters should maintain publicly available contact information on the ASA webpage and in any other appropriate community venues.

Public Meetings

ASA Chapters are required to hold meetings at least once a month. Meetings should be publicly announced at least two weeks in advance. Chapter meetings must also be held in a publicly accessible location that is accessible to those with disabilities.

ASA Chapter meetings should, if possible, not be held at a dispensary or other commercial medical cannabis location. This is to prevent ASA Chapters from being seen as explicitly or implicitly endorsing a specific medical cannabis related business entity. Also, we want to ensure that supporters and family members are welcome at these public meetings, not just patients and caregivers. If it is absolutely necessary to hold a chapter meeting at a dispensary location, the meetings should rotate among dispensaries so that it is clear that the chapter supports all of the local facilities.

Elections

Every ASA Chapter must hold annual elections that are publicly announced at least one month in advance. ASA staff must also be included in this notification. The results should be announced at the elections themselves, and the results should be publicly announced within a week of the elections.

B. WITH NATIONAL ASA:

ASA Chapter participation in monthly ASA conference calls: Every ASA Chapter should have a least one person from the chapter participating in national ASA monthly conference calls for chapters and affiliates.

National ASA campaigns:

All ASA Chapters must participate in national ASA campaigns and actions.

Check-ins:

ASA Chapters should be available for consultations and check-ins with national ASA staff.

Yearly reporting:

All ASA chapters must complete a yearly summary of the following:

1. Goals
2. Key accomplishments and challenges for the year
3. List of members
4. Name and contact info for the five Coordinating Council members and officers, if designated
5. Simple financial statement of income, expenses, and assets
6. Goals for the coming year

The national ASA staff will provide a report form. Reports are to be submitted by January 30th, following the close of the year.

C. FINANCIAL REQUIREMENTS:

Chapter bank accounts

If needed, ASA Chapters should store their funds in a bank account that has two chapter signatories.

ASA does not provide bank accounts for ASA chapters or hold ASA chapter funds.

Exceptions shall be made for one-time projects of \$10,000 or more, where a donor would like to receive a tax deduction. ASA can administer such a fund for a small administrative fee.

Your chapter bank account is not a National ASA bank account. You should speak to a

qualified accountant or tax advisor about the tax liabilities that may arise from opening a chapter bank account.

Fundraising

Local ASA Chapter fundraising is allowed and encouraged. When engaging in local fundraising, chapters should be clear to contributors that their contributions:

- are not going to the national ASA organization.
- do not count toward ASA membership.
- are not tax-deductible and do not receive a 501(c)(3) tax write-off.

Incorporating as a Separate Entity

ASA chapters are not allowed to incorporate as separate nonprofit entities. ASA chapters that are interested in doing so are encouraged to become ASA affiliates and incorporate as separate, non-ASA organizations without the ASA brand. Alternatively, ASA Chapters may ask another nonprofit to be their fiscal sponsor. A quick google search on "fiscal sponsorship for nonprofits" will yield important resources to guide you in this process.

VI PLANNING AND EXECUTING YOUR FIRST MEETINGS

Talk to your friends and other like minded individuals. Even if you begin with only two or three people, don't be discouraged. Pick a meeting spot and begin advertising your meeting at least two weeks before it actually occurs. Hang flyers in targeted areas, call local papers and radio stations to get listed in their events calendars, and don't forget to tell ASA so we can publicize your meeting on our email lists. You can't do too much outreach.

SAMPLE AGENDA

****It is most important to do two things during this first meeting: collect contact information and set the next meeting time and place.****

1. Pick a facilitator or two and a note taker. It

is the responsibility of the facilitator to keep a meeting moving along on time, and to make sure the meeting sticks to the agenda so that everyone who wants to speak gets an opportunity. It important the facilitator not "police" the meeting but guide it.

2. Read meeting ground rules and get a consensus from the group that they will be respected. The group may decide to add rules as well. It will be up to the facilitator to gently remind people of the ground rules if they are broken to keep the meeting running smoothly.
3. Introduce the agenda and ask for any additions. It is a good rule of thumb to have "announcements" as the last agenda item. This gives members the opportunity to talk about other items without filling up meeting time to do so. Then go through each item and give a rough estimate of how long you want to spend on each item. It will then be the facilitator's duty to remind the group if they are going over time. If an item is taking more time than allotted, the facilitator should ask the group if they want to agree to add more time to the item or move on.
4. Do a go-around of introductions, including name, affiliation, and interest in the issue (be sure to specify that each intro should be limited to 2 minutes or this could take up your entire meeting). Pass around a sign-up sheet and collect numbers, email addresses, etc.
5. Read ASA's mission and goals to the group to make sure that everyone is on the same page from day one!
6. Review ASA campaigns, how they apply to your group and what other challenges your community faces. Check with ASA staff before your meeting to get a list of most recent campaigns. Pass around Pledge of Resistance cards & collect signed ones later in the meeting to send to the ASA office.
7. Review upcoming events and actions that both ASA national are planning as well as

local events such as city council meetings, court hearings, etc.

8. Brainstorm a list of tasks and steps that you need to accomplish for the items discussed in item #7 and get volunteers to take on items. Some examples of such tasks might be:

Media: Do you need a press release? Do you need media talking points for participants?

Outreach: Contacting other like minded groups to join you in your efforts, making flyers to ensure greater turnout, etc.

Art and visuals: Do you need signs, banners, t-shirts, or other visuals for the event?

Materials: Do you need something to hand out at the event to educate target audience?

9. Is everyone on e-mail? Do you need a listserv to stay in touch? Should you have a phone tree?
10. Dispatch: Review who is going to do each thing, including send out the notes and a list of contacts, and pass the hat for costs. Don't forget to set the next meeting date and place! Close your meeting, thank the facilitators and participants.
11. Announcements: This is a time to allow those who want to share items that may be outside the realm of the agenda
12. Socialize afterward!

VII BEYOND THE FIRST MEETING

Before your second meeting, you should phone everyone in the group to remind them of the next meeting and try to get people to personally commit to attending. At the second meeting, decide on some action items to get started. You may want to host a benefit or other type of event to get your feet wet. This also empowers your membership to go on to bigger things. Look through the campaign strategy and the event options in this booklet and discuss them with your group; settle on one, develop an action plan, and follow through on it.

If your group is working well together, a

good way to keep people committed and engaged may be to create committees or working groups to tackle major items. You can have break outs at these meetings for these groups to meet and report back to the main group. Some examples of working groups you may choose include:

- Media working group
- Outreach working group: Everyone should do this, but a group can schedule tabling and leafleting opportunities. Setting up a table is a great way to get free admission into events!
- Art in action working group: People who can put the time into making props, puppets, planning street theatre, music, etc.
- Alliance-building working group: Unlike outreach, this involves going to other existing groups, offering your group's support, and soliciting theirs. These are the ambassadors—a very important and often-neglected role.
- Fundraising working group: Planning fun events that can support your work.
- Education working group: May plan forums, curriculum, develop leaflets, etc.

The working groups depend on the interests and abilities of your membership. Make sure one person is the primary contact for each workgroup and that that person's contact info is included in the notes and available to all chapter members and the national office.

Remember to network with the national ASA office so we know what local groups have formed and can facilitate communication among groups. Please make copies of your participant lists and send them to us so that we can add the names to our national list. Copy the "Pledge of Resistance" and collect signatures, and send copies of that to the national office as well.

Use Roving Facilitators

There are several ways to share leadership within a group, but one effective method is using roving facilitators. At each meeting, two

people should volunteer or be chosen to facilitate the next meeting (It's often fun working with others as facilitators, and in case one person cannot make it to the following meeting, the other will be there to facilitate). These people will be responsible for:

- Helping to promote the meeting.
- Creating an agenda for the meeting.
- Moderating the meeting to ensure it runs smoothly.

The facilitators should rotate in order to give several people the chance to be involved.

Encourage new activists to co-facilitate with someone who's been involved for a long time. Challenge facilitators to come up with creative activities or presentations for the meetings. Have fun with this!

Setting Meeting Rules

At the beginning of each ASA meeting, the facilitators should set ground rules for the meetings. Here are some basic rules that help meetings run smoothly:

- Do not interrupt others while they speak
- Raise your hand to speak
- Assume best intentions

- Be respectful when disagreeing
- Do not repeat others

In addition to these rules, facilitators should ask the rest of the group to provide ground rules for the meeting.

Monthly Agenda Outline

This rough outline should be used every month. While we ask that ASA chapters and affiliates cover certain issues monthly, there is a lot of room for local input and creativity.

- a. Introductions
- b. Present the agenda and ground rules and ask for additional suggestions
- c. Give a national update (this will be provided to you monthly through an email from the ASA office)
- d. Discuss local medical cannabis issues
- e. Prepare for an upcoming event or action or do a political activity, like writing to an elected representative about a pending bill (find ideas in the Organizing Skills section of this handbook)
- f. Pick two facilitators and set a time, date and place for the next meeting
- g. Socialize!