



Working With Administrators

University administrators can be powerful allies when it comes to protecting and defending student expression on campus. Whether you are trying to plan an event, host a speaker, or reform a university policy, it is likely that you'll need the assistance of administrators along the way. With that in mind, here are a few tips for making your collaboration with administrators as efficient and effective as possible.

DON'T BE HOSTILE

As the old saying goes, you'll catch more flies with honey than with vinegar, and that is often true when working with campus administrators. While there are cases where administrators have enforced unconstitutional or misguided speech codes, it's important not to assume bad faith from the outset. Never be afraid to stand up for and defend your rights, but don't assume that every administrator you encounter is out to violate them. Instead, seek to establish cooperation and develop a rapport so that if there is a disagreement or conflict, there's still common ground to work on.

HAVE A PLAN READY

Before any meetings or phone calls, write down what you wish to accomplish and have talking points ready that illustrate why what you plan to do is important to you and your fellow students. Reading your university's mission can help you illustrate why your initiative aligns with the school's mission and is ultimately important for its goals. Try to anticipate questions and prepare answers.

TALK TO THE RIGHT PEOPLE

University administrations are often complex and well-defined, with particular offices or positions having specific responsibilities. Before reaching out, it's important to be sure that the person you plan to contact has sufficient authority over the outcome you're trying to achieve. For example, the Office of the Provost probably doesn't handle event planning directly, and the Office of Event Planning probably won't have the authority to reform a university-wide policy. Understanding the structure and hierarchy of your school's administration before reaching out will ensure that you're talking to the right people from the start. Information about a school's administrative roles can often be found online.

COMMUNICATE CLEARLY AND IN WRITING

In-person discussions are helpful in building rapport and establishing trust and cooperation, but the lack of a written record can make it difficult to follow through on plans made face-to-face. If you are promised funding, a venue, a changed policy, or any other type of commitment from your school, ensure it is in written or email form. The same goes for denials of any requests. A saved record of a rejection can help you later on when appealing the school's decision. Following up on an in-person meeting with an email is an easy way to make sure commitments or denials are recorded. If you sign any contract or binding agreement, make sure to review the terms carefully beforehand and keep a copy for yourself.



KNOW YOUR SCHOOL'S POLICIES

Most universities have specific procedures for bringing in outside speakers and planning large gatherings. Make sure to review the rules and policies relevant to your plans before meeting with administrators or making any requests.

BUILD COALITIONS WITH OTHER STUDENTS

There are probably many other students on campus who will benefit from your activism event or policy proposal. Student groups can be particularly helpful in facilitating relationships with certain administrators, and they often know how to best approach campus policies. Additionally, a large and diverse base of support is more effective in convincing administrators of the necessity of your requests. Learn more about [building coalitions on campus](#).

ASK FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

Reach out and ask for recommendations from others who have successfully gone through the process of changing policies or organizing events. Other students and administrators familiar with your school's policies can give you advice to prepare for meetings, fill out proper documentation and proposals, and give general advice on what to expect throughout the process. As always, if you have any questions, feel free to contact us at FIRE!