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Twelve Steps for Forming Your Red Cross Campus Club

Youth Services, American Red Cross

Wednesday, October 01, 2003 — If you are reading this, you've already leaped a major hurdle in starting a Red Cross campus club. That is, you already possess interest and motivation! The rest is just details, but important details, nonetheless.

Following are 12 steps for getting your club up and active.

Step 1 – Contact the Red Cross unit nearest your campus for guidance and approval.

You may already have done this. If so, you should know that the local Red Cross unit – whether it's your local chapter or Blood Services region – will be your greatest resource for information and support.

One of the first things a Red Cross representative should tell you is that your club will require formal recognition and approval from the unit's board or advisory council. Most Red Cross units are eager to sponsor a Red Cross campus club in their jurisdiction, so getting approval should be a relatively easy process.

Also, there are some realities you should be aware of up front. Namely –

- When it comes to providing Red Cross services on campus or in the community, we encourage you to be creative and energetic. However, Red Cross campus clubs are not autonomous Red Cross units. Your club is a branch of the sponsoring Red Cross chapter or Blood Services region and, therefore, like any other division within the organization, is under its auspices and guidance.
- All club projects and activities must be approved by the sponsoring Red Cross unit.
- Your members, as representatives of the American Red Cross, must abide by the organization's Code of Conduct.

Step 2 – Get your school's approval

Once you've started the ball rolling with your local Red Cross unit, inform the appropriate office at your school about your intention to start a Red Cross campus club.

Most colleges and universities have procedures that must be followed before any group can form an officially recognized student club on campus. For example, your school may require that you name officers, appoint a faculty or staff advisor or submit a statement of purpose or constitution. Frequently, you must meet the requirement to –

- Secure meeting space on campus.
- Use the name of the school.
- Apply for funding from college sources.

Since most colleges and universities provide funding for official student groups, it's always wise to follow the proper procedures.

Step 3 – Name your club.

Your American Red Cross campus club should be officially titled “American Red Cross Club of *school name*.” This will help ensure consistency across the country – plus there’s the added benefit of having your club listed at the top of the alphabetical club lists at your school!

Step 4 – Begin thinking of Red Cross-related activities in which you’d like to see your club become involved.

Your Red Cross campus club’s activities and projects should mirror the services offered by your sponsoring Red Cross unit. Your Red Cross liaison should be able to provide you with an abundance of ideas to get you started.

Keep in mind that your club activities and projects need to be related to the Red Cross mission of providing relief to victims of disasters and helping people prevent, prepare for, and respond to emergencies.

It helps to determine general areas of focus for your club before the first official club meeting. While you want to consider members’ interests and ideas, you’ll want to have an initial framework for the club; otherwise things will appear disorganized – which could turn off prospective club members. (See section 4 the Campus Guide, ARC 1281, for ideas on different areas of focus.)

Step 5 – Develop a structure for your club

Once it appears that your club will receive approval from both the Red Cross and your college and you have determined the general areas of service your club will focus on, start developing a structure for your club.

Red Cross campus clubs typically have a president and other officers, such as a secretary and a treasurer, who form the executive board. Many clubs have various committees that represent the club’s areas of focus, with a chair heading each committee. This type of structure builds in numerous opportunities for leadership roles and is one that we recommend.

For example, in addition to your officers, your club structure may include a –

- Health and Safety Committee;
- Disaster Services Committee;
- International Services Committee;
- Blood Services Committee, where applicable;
- Armed Forces Emergency Services Committee;
- Local Community Outreach Committee; and
- Special Events Committee.

Each of your committees should be chaired by a club member.

It also is helpful to have a board of advisors made up of club members, the local Red Cross liaison assigned to your club and at least one representative from your college or university.

In addition, when structuring your club, be sure to clearly articulate such things as –

- How often your club will meet;
- The minimum volunteer hours required from each member; and
- What kinds of behavior may result in disciplinary action or expulsion from the club?

Step 6 – Create job descriptions.

You will need individual job descriptions for leadership positions as well as group job descriptions for committee members.

Step 7 – Create a budget for your activities.

Start developing a preliminary budget. This will help you prioritize activities. Also, having a well-thought-out budget is often the first step to obtaining funds from your college of university.

Your Red Cross unit liaison should be able to help you get started formulating a budget for your club. In addition to budgeting for service projects, you'll want to plan for things like recruitment campaign costs, refreshments and recognition.

American Red Cross campus club members report that there are many sources of funding for clubs right on campus, if you are willing to ask. Some clubs have been successful in securing funds from –

- The Student Government Association;
- The president's or dean's discretionary fund;
- The Office of Student Affairs;
- Religious organizations on campus, such as the chapel;
- Schools or departments, such as International or Area Studies Center
- The Student Health Center;
- The Women's Center or other interest groups such as the Black Students' Association; and
- The University store.

For example, the Duke Red Cross Club receives funds from the university chapel, which helps support the First Aid for Children Today program. Club members have also been successful in having the university donate store credit for miscellaneous supplies the club needs.

Step 8 - Write a constitution for your club.

A constitution (or a statement of purpose) will help formalize the club's structure and spell out procedures that have been agreed upon, such as the election of officers, Code of Conduct, meeting schedule and so forth.

Step 9 - Communicate with your local Red Cross unit.

Designate one of your members (usually it's the club president) as the primary contact with the unit. This student leader could provide reports to the local unit's board of directors and perhaps even serve as a board member, if invited by the unit. The important thing is to make sure the lines of communication stay open between your club and your local Red Cross unit.

Step 10 - Start recruiting members for your club.

To initially recruit members, start with flyers, emails, ads in the student newspaper, volunteer and club fairs and table tents in the cafeteria. Word of mouth from your core group of founding members is invaluable. Their enthusiasm and passion about the club is probably your best form of advertising.

Step 11 - Use your first meeting as a brainstorming session.

Use your first club meeting not only as an opportunity to pass on information about your club but also as a brainstorming session. Probe those who attend the meeting for their ideas about the kinds of projects they'd like to be involved with. The most your club's activities mesh with its members' interests, the more successful it will be.

To encourage discussion –

- Inform members about the range of services offered by your sponsoring Red Cross unit.
- Describe the club's initial structure and service areas.
- Ask your members what kinds of activities interest them the most and how those interests fit into providing Red Cross services. For example, are they interested in health and safety issues? Would they like to participate on Red Cross Disaster Action Teams? Are some interested in organizing a campus wide blood drive? Many members will be interested in honing career skills. Encourage them to target a Red Cross service that will help them accomplish their personal goals.

- Be creative and allow for free-flowing discussions. You'll be surprised at the ideas that will be generated.

Step 12 - Register your Red Cross campus club with American Red Cross national headquarters!

Visit the Red Cross Club site at www.redcross.org and fill in the short registration form. This will ensure that national headquarters is aware of your club and that your club will be informed of Red Cross opportunities at the national level. Your Red Cross club will become part of the growing club network that shares ideas and best practices.

The Campus Red Cross Club Student Leadership Guide provides further guidance on setting up a club, including:

Section 1: Welcome

Section 2: Brief History of the Red Cross

Section 3: Starting Your Red Cross Campus Club and Holding Effective Meetings

Section 4: Ways to Get Involved

Section 5: National Service Days

Section 6: American Red Cross Code of Conduct

Section 7: Recruiting, Retaining and Recognizing Members

Section 8: Creating a Web Site for your Club

Section 9: Interacting With the Media

Section 10: Resources on:

- Funding
- Opportunities for Young Adults
- Publications
- Web sites
- Active Campus Red Cross Clubs

Appendices:

Appendix 1: Executive Board Officers' Roles and Responsibilities

Appendix 2: Job Description for an Individual and a Group (samples)

Appendix 3: Letter Requesting Funds (Sample)

Appendix 4: Constitution and Bylaws (General information and a sample)

The Campus Red Cross Club Student Leadership Guide is available through your local American Red Cross chapter (order number ARC1281).



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