

How to Get the Most Out of Action Network

A Few Online Organizing Tips for College Students for Bernie

If you're reading this, you are probably associated with College Students for Bernie, and hopefully already have an Action Network account and a chapter group part of the overall Students for Bernie network. If not, be sure to [join the top level group](#), after which you will be added to the Slack and be able to create a subgroup within the network.

If you would like to start a subgroup, we need to make you an admin of the top level group. Please post in the Slack that you need to be made an admin and we will do so as soon as possible.

Now, we'll assume that you have a subgroup for your chapter that is a subgroup of College Students for Bernie. This guide will help you get the most out of Action Network through inter-chapter communication, customized emails, and synchronized actions, meetings, and campaigns.

If you have any questions concerning the tasks described here, ask them on the College Students for Bernie Slack (which you should be invited to within 10 minutes of joining the top level group), [ask the developers of Action Network](#), or send me an email at ben.paul.ryan.packer@gmail.com.

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What We Can Accomplish

If deployed correctly, we will have created a national student organizing network that is unprecedented both in scale and ability to communicate quickly and effectively. We ought to use it to accomplish more than just elect Bernie Sanders.

Chapters within a state should organize around state elections and state issues. A good deal of the reform that must occur, particularly related to the criminal justice system, is handled at a subnational level. We can have an influence on these issues in the immediate future.

Furthermore, if Bernie is to have any chance of passing many of the things he would like to pass, it will require both Senate and House majorities. This network can also be deployed to accomplish that, as well as to lobby incumbents.

Although we may still look to the things like Students for a Democracy Society with nostalgia, **we are in the midst of building student activist infrastructure that dwarfs those of students past both in terms of size and power.**

Furthermore, this is a time when, due to generational differences, *we are better* at using the tools that have the most power: social media and the internet. A failure to effectively seize this moment to **transform our political process and what it means to be a student** would be a colossal waste of potential with terrible, long-lasting consequences.

Federation

Action Network allows groups to be subgroups of parent groups. This enables our virtual organizational structure to parallel our real one, offering numerous benefits.

Simple Federation

Imagine all groups are underneath College Students for Bernie (the top level group), which creates a structure that looks like this:

- College Students for Bernie
 - College *a*
 - College *b*
 - College *c*
 - ...
 - College *z*

How To

In order to create a group that is a subgroup of another, navigate to the edit or create group page. To create a group, hover over “Start Organizing” at the top, and then click Create Group. You will know you are at the right page when the url is:

<https://actionnetwork.org/groups/<your-group-name>/edit>

After the big text area where the group description lives, you will see a drop down menu to select the group you would like to be a subgroup of. After the parent group approves your request, your group will be a subgroup of the larger one.

A Little More Complicated

While that structure is still useful, we can get more control and customization with a further subdivided organizational structure, like this:

- College Students for Bernie
 - Subgroup A
 - College *a*
 - College *b*
 - Subgroup B
 - ...
 -
 - Subgroup Z
 - College *y*
 - College *z*

How To

If x and y are currently subgroups of College Students for Bernie, but would like to be part of a Subgroup A (itself a subgroup of College Students for Bernie), follow these instructions:

Create a new group, Subgroup A, as a subgroup of College Students for Bernie the same way groups x and y became subgroups of College Students for Bernie.

Then, have admins of group x and y change their respective groups to be under to the newly created Subgroup A.

That's it! We have decided to have national, regional, and state groups before individual chapters. If there is not a group for your state, make a group for your state before creating a group for your chapter.

When Should We Create a Subgroup?

It may be difficult to decide when a set of colleges should remain un-organized underneath a larger group and when they should further divide themselves. While this decision should be made by the specific groups involved, here are some principles that may help you decide.

Large Size

If there are too many undifferentiated colleges within a group, it may be a good idea to subdivide them. This will allow you to customize actions taken on behalf of the whole group.

Common Characteristics

If a set of Colleges have some common characteristics such that grouping their actions would save time, creating a subgroup for them is probably a good idea. Common characteristics include being in the same state (the same primary), being in the same county (common local political issues), or being of a similar size or type (different colleges have different issues).

Remember: subgrouping can be done infinitely, so that you can have a state subgroup and a locality subgroup within that state subgroup.

The other tips in this guide rely on effective grouping, so if something isn't working well, you may want to revisit this step.

Action Network's Syndication Feature

Action Network allows actions (forms, emails, petitions, events, and fundraisers) to be “syndicated” between groups in a network.

This use of “syndicated” means recommended, or passed along. For example, I could create a form at the national level that I want all chapters to have their members fill out. Rather than have each chapter admin create the form, each will instead receive a syndication package with the form that they can then edit and deploy.

By default, actions can only be syndicated downwards. That means that Subgroup A can syndicate actions to Colleges *a* and *b*, but not to the colleges underneath Subgroups B – Z. The ability to syndicate horizontally (from A to B or from *a* to *b*), or syndicate upwards (from *a* to A, or from A to College Students for Bernie), must be manually configured by the Action Network developers themselves.

Therefore, in order to ensure maximum low-level access to originating actions, each group that contains subgroups within it (College Students for Bernie or any of the groups A – Z) should have a form through which one can request an action be syndicated downwards.

To learn more about what Action Network's syndication allows, take a look at the tutorials [here](#). What follows is a guide on how to use the feature to customize mass emails and nationally coordinate meeting agendas.

Customized Mass Emails

Often, we will want to send emails to the whole national College Students for Bernie list, or to regional or local sublists. Action Network makes this very easy; all you have to do is go to the “Start Organizing” panel, and underneath “People” click “Create Email”. Follow the instructions for selecting an email list and then create the email. After the email has been written, you can further target the recipients of the email using very nuanced selection tools.

If you don't want the email to be customized at lower levels, just go ahead and send it.

If, however, you do want each region or state to customize it – e.g., by adding the significance of the content to their state's political focus – save the email without sending it.

Next, navigate to the group that you will originate the syndication from and click “Syndicate” at the bottom of the action panel on the right. Then, create a new syndication package. Give it a title and add some groups (underneath your group) that you would like the syndication package sent to. Then, type a little message to the subgroup administrators about how you would like them to use and/or modify the syndication package for their particular circumstances. Click “Save Draft”, and you'll be taken to a screen called “Manage Syndication Package”.

Click “Edit or Remove Email”, and then add the draft of the email you just created. Publish the syndication package, and each group that receives it can view the package, modify the text of the email, and send it to their own customized target.

Coordinating Meeting Agendas

We are participating in a network of groups that have national weekly meetings, so it makes sense to have agendas for those meetings coordinated across national, regional, and state groups. Thus, each chapter's meeting will consist of a portion of national, state, and chapter specific business.

The easiest way to accomplish this is to syndicate Action Network forms for each agenda item. If you would like all of your subgroups to take a specific action, or deliberate on a certain topic, you can syndicate a form downwards.

The syndication message to subgroup admins should contain information about what should be done. The form sent along should contain all of the fields necessary to report back on the progress achieved.

For example, you could syndicate a package downward requesting that each chapter hold a phone banking party. The package should include a form asking how many calls were made, how many people attended, as well as open ended questions about how it went overall.

The responses will automatically flow back up to you, and you will be able to see how each event went and how many calls were made in total. Each form should contain a combination of quantitative and qualitative responses. Quantitative responses can be easily aggregated, while qualitative ones give more detailed information.

Syndication Requests

Each group that has subgroups within it should maintain a form that lets subgroups request syndication packages to other subgroups. This form should contain all fields required to create the syndication package, including the target groups and an email or other actions to be included, if any.

This way, any College *a* can request that all sister Colleges *b – z* have meetings discussing a particular topic or organizing around a particular issue.