

# How to Start a Club

## **For Formerly Incarcerated Students in California Community Colleges**

Created based on input from formerly incarcerated students throughout California

### Why Have a Student Club?

- A student club creates a safe and non-judgmental space where formerly incarcerated students feel comfortable and welcomed. Students may ask questions that they otherwise might not ask and it alleviates feelings of isolation that can cause students to drop out.
- A student club can connect its members with community organizations that provide tattoo removal, record clearance, mental health care, and other services.
- Clubs can be a way for formerly incarcerated students to connect with faculty and staff who can become mentors. The club can also provide leadership and professional development opportunities for its members, which can help students build resumes.
- Clubs can build on- and off-campus partnerships. These might include partnerships with nearby four-year colleges to create transfer pipelines, on-campus networks to increase work-study or other employment opportunities, and pathways into existing statewide and national student networks.

### What to Know Before You Start

- All community colleges are different, but the information in this Toolkit should be accurate for most colleges.
- Student clubs almost always have access to some campus funding for student club events, but they will need to meet certain requirements. Most campuses have a lot of oversight and paperwork required before the club can use the funds or plan events.
- Be aware that formerly incarcerated students on campus might not want to self-identify. Confidentiality will likely be important, and it may be challenging to recruit other students to join. Some students may also be uncomfortable with the hierarchy required in order to create a club, and it may be challenging to agree on a President, Vice-President and other required club positions.
- Many colleges call the process of creating a new club “chartering.” You may hear someone refer to “chartering a new student club.”

---

## Step One: Find Out What Your College Requires

On some campuses, there will be a specific department or office that oversees all student clubs. If you do not know which department or office that is, start with your Office of Student Services. On your campus, this office may also be called Student Affairs, Student Activities, Student Life Center, or something similar. Student Services may refer you to a different department, such as Student Council.

- **Go in Person:** Once you find the right department, go in and tell them that you want to start a student club. Ask them what you need to do. You may need to make an appointment.
- **Expect Paperwork:** There will be forms and you will have to meet certain requirements. Many colleges will have an official application that must be filled out before you can create a new student club.
  - **Find Existing Policies and Rules:** There may also be written policies and rules about what kinds of clubs can be created. Sometimes these policies can be found online.
- **Ask for Help:** If it is easier for you, start by reaching out to a faculty member with whom you feel comfortable.

## Step Two: Talk to Other Students

It is likely that there are more formerly incarcerated students on your campus than you realize. Here are some suggestions about how you might find other formerly incarcerated students on your campus and how to assign leadership roles.

- **Create a Recruitment Strategy:** You will need to recruit students to assist in the club chartering process. Begin this process early, because it might take awhile to find enough people who are willing to make a commitment.
  - **Share Your Story:** If you are open about your experience, ask professors/instructors to let you present or share your story in their classroom.
  - **Get Referrals:** If you have a good rapport with faculty members, ask them to refer students with similar backgrounds to you.

- **Table at Events:** Ask if you can table during campus events in order to recruit potential members and get the word out.
- **Assign Leadership Roles:** Before becoming an official student club, you will be required to assign leadership roles. Be upfront with other students about what you are asking them to do. It is better for someone to say no at the beginning than for someone to agree to do it and drop out in the middle.

## Step Three: Complete the Application

Review the application packet. This might also be called the chartering packet. Make a list of all requirements in the packet, so you don't overlook any of them. It will also be helpful to review campus policies or rules, if your college has them.

- **Demonstrate Participation:** You will need to show that you have a minimum number of interested students and an advisor. You will also need to vote on leadership roles; e.g. President, Vice President, Treasurer, and Secretary.
- **Draft the Club Mission, Vision Statement, and Constitution:** You will have to draft the club's mission and vision statement and have a written "Constitution" which addresses issues like voting rules and membership requirements.
  - **Look for a Template:** The office that gives you the application might have a template or an example, so you know what to write.
  - **Ask for Examples:** Ask other student clubs to share their mission and vision statements, along with their constitution.
  - **Be Collaborative:** Make sure that you involve other students in the creation of these documents. This may take longer than doing it yourself, but by involving other students you know that the end result will be one that everyone can agree on.
- **Offer Confidentiality:** Some of the club members may choose not to identify as formerly incarcerated. Make sure to include a statement about confidentiality in the constitution, stating that a person's membership in the club will not be disclosed by other members without their permission.

---

## Step Four: Find an Advisor

Almost all colleges will require that you have a faculty advisor. This will be any person who is a professor, instructor, or counselor. Some campuses will also allow a staff person who is not a faculty member to be your advisor.

- **Find a Strong Supporter:** If you have more than one strong supporter on your campus, consider asking them to be co-advisors. This way, you create more support on your campus and you have a back-up if your primary advisor is busy or does not respond.
- **Provide All Documents:** Your advisor will need to review all your application documents and sign them before you submit the application.

## Step Five: Submit the Application

Make sure you have completed all documents, and that you have the required signatures. Make a copy of your documents with the signatures before you submit them, in case anything gets lost. You could also take a picture with your phone.

- **Ask When You Will Get a Response:** How long they need to review the documents will vary but they should be able to give you an estimated date. If that date has passed and you haven't heard anything, go back and ask for the status of the application.

## Step Six: Keep It Going

- **Build a Campus Presence:** This will enable you to recruit new members each semester. Look around at other clubs and see how they promote themselves. There may be a club fair or campus event for all students. Make sure your club is included in these activities.
- **Consider Co-Sponsoring Events:** These could be talks on mass incarceration or racial injustices in the criminal justice system, or an event where you invite a prominent speaker to your campus. It can be easier to organize events if you partner with another club or organization.