

Building A “Successful” Young Republican Club



Georgia Young Republicans

Building Georgia's Next Generation of Republican Leaders

www.GeorgiaYR.org

Georgia Young Republicans
c/o Chairman Cameron Fash
2854 Ridgemore Rd.
Atlanta, GA 30318

Dear Young Republican,

Thank you for your interest in growing the Young Republicans in order to help promote and strengthen the Republican Party.

I created this document as an addendum to our original “Building a Young Republican Club” packet. While there is some value to the original version, there is a key component missing: how to make your club successful. We’ve told you how to start your organization, and now we want to provide key guidelines and advice for how to make your club a success.

I hope you will find this document helpful in “Building a **Successful** Young Republican Club” in your community.

Sincerely,

Cameron Fash, Chairman
chairman@georgiayr.org

Getting Started

There are two philosophies for starting a Young Republican club:

1. Start slow and work to gradually build your numbers
2. Start with a kick-off party, designed to turnout people from the very beginning

I subscribe to philosophy #2. It is crucial to get your club up and running as quickly as possible. In order to do that you must provide an inviting atmosphere for individuals who want to - or think they might want to - get involved. Please note: this does not mean you throw an unplanned party and expect people to show. You need to think about: (i) where you will hold the event, (ii) who will be there, (iii) how you will contact them and (iv) when it will take place. A well-planned first event will help draw many people to your club, the numbers will motivate them to come back and a big event will attract big-name politicians. Most members do not want to build a club; they want to be part of a thriving one. If they see a room full of energetic, likeminded individuals, they will return.

Planning

When planning your meetings and social events you should prepare at least three months in advance. This is done for many reasons: (i) it allows you to get an elected official scheduled for meetings before he/she is booked by someone else, (ii) it allows you time to find a replacement if a scheduled speaker cancels (elected officials are busy!), (iii) it allows you to promote your event with all the details well in advance and (iv) it allows you to reserve a private room, patio, etc, because you are securing your location way in advance. Never be afraid to ask for drink/food specials. If they will not give you one, go somewhere that will.

Location

Where do you hold your meetings? Are you meeting in a library or community center? Perhaps a family restaurant or Party headquarters? Or are you meeting at a local bar or restaurant? If you are meeting at a library, community center, family restaurant or Party headquarters, chances are you will have low turnouts to your meetings and happy hours. Why? Because these locations do not present a fun, inviting atmosphere.

Key to a successful meeting location is accessibility and enjoyment. Choose a popular restaurant/bar that appeals to young professionals, preferably one that has a private or secluded room, and one that serves alcohol. Don't go to a location just because you like it or it is convenient for you; select your location based on what your members want and enjoy. A survey is very useful for determining the best location to hold events. When you decide where to hold your meeting, stick with that location. Your members should not have to check the website, their email or call anyone to ask where this month's meeting will be held. By holding your meeting on the same date and time (i.e., 4th Wednesday of every month at 7 PM) at the same location, your members will always know where to be on that day. Make the process easy on yourself and on your members. The harder it is to find you, the greater the chance that people will not show.

Sample Meeting Agenda

7:00 - 7:30 PM	Social/Networking Period
7:30 PM	Welcome
7:35 PM	Introduction of Special Guests
7:40 PM	Introduction of Key Note Speaker
7:45 PM	Speaker
8:15 PM	Questions
8:25 PM	Announcements
8:30 PM	Adjourn

It is important that you hold a social/networking period prior to the structured part of your meeting. This will give members and guests time to arrive, have a few drinks, relax and network. If you wait and just have a social period after your meeting, you have missed your chance. A successful club will have members stick around afterwards on their own because they already had fun prior to the meeting and will want to continue socializing after the meeting.

The vast majority of those who come to YR meetings are already Republican, and you don't need to convince them of it. While it always a great idea to "rally the troops" by talking about Democrats' policy problems or issues we face as a Party, what you should do is provide your attendees with an opportunity to meet their elected officials, to hear personal accounts of what these officials are doing and present members and guests with opportunities to get involved with the Party and candidates.

Social Events

You must have a monthly, non-political social event that you can use to build friendships, network and most importantly, have fun. This helps break the stereotype that politics is boring. Make this a monthly event, preferably two weeks before/after your monthly meeting. The social event location can change each month, but always keep the day and time the same (i.e., second Wednesday of every month, 7 PM).

Collect Information & Follow Up with Guests

The importance of following up with your guests can not be emphasized enough. Be sure to have each and every person, both members and guests, sign in as they enter meetings and socials. Gather names, email addresses, phone numbers, etc. In addition to gathering contact information, this helps you track who comes to your events and who has missed them. After each event, contact your guests by email as well as by phone to thank them for coming. An email is nice, but a phone call seals the deal. And make each follow-up personal. No one should feel like a guest at their second event.

Website and E-Newsletters

Your use of web technology will play a major role in the success of your club. The days of looking for organizations in the phone book are over. You must have a website. If you don't have a website, people do not think you exist. A high-tech website can be expensive. While the more professional you look the better, do not break the bank implementing a website.

A well-designed website will have certain key items: (i) a brief description of the organization on the welcome page (include meeting location, date and time), (ii) a membership page where people can join and securely pay their dues online, (iii) contact page/information and (iv) an events page/calendar. While the best way to draw people back to your website is to make it easy to navigate and create a dynamic home page – where you update it with upcoming events, news stories, photos, blog entries, etc. - stay away from creating a slow-loading website as this will prevent most people from coming back.

Individuals are visiting your website specifically for the content, but the appearance and usability are critical factors. If a visit to your website is a positive experience, you have a much better chance of converting prospects to members.

Here are 12 Common Design Mistakes to Avoid (adapted from Larry Baltz's "12 Common Web Design Mistakes That Drive Your Prospects Away"):

Web design mistakes can have a tremendous negative impact on both Search Engine Optimization (SEO) and organization growth. With countless millions of websites, users will not tolerate unprofessional and disorganized sites that don't provide the information or solutions they are looking for and expect.

1. Lack of Focus: Too many websites leave visitors wondering what the site is about. Be sure your home page explicitly conveys what you do and the value you offer, and entices them to explore other pages for additional information.
2. Text-heavy Pages: Actually, lots of text is OK, just don't use lengthy paragraphs with no visual breaks. Reading online is much different than print. Use the following to break-up blocks of text:
(i) shorter, more focused paragraphs, (ii) headlines and subheads, (iii) bullets and numbers, (iv) a few well-placed photos or graphics and (v) appropriate white space.
3. Legibility Issues: Use common sense when selecting colors and sizes. Dark fonts on dark backgrounds, light fonts on light backgrounds and tiny fonts that strain the eye are obviously bad choices.
4. "Noise" and Clutter: Even if you have a great site, if your visitors are forced to wade through a long intro, long blocks of copy, excessive informational boxes or photos, animation, sales pitches and worthless text, you'll quickly confuse them and drive them away.
5. Blatant Advertising: While we all hope to use our website to move prospects to join, in-your-face advertising isn't the answer. Information, solutions and value will do the job more

effectively. And while pop-up ads are common and some times acceptable, full screen pop-ups that are difficult to close infuriate everyone.

6. Navigation Issues: A clear, obvious navigational menu just makes sense. How easily can a newcomer navigate your site?

7. Inappropriate Graphics and Photos: Photos and graphics greatly enhance the appearance of your site as well as support and substantiate your text, but don't use load-intensive graphics or photos that are not relevant.

8. Outdated Information: Nothing screams "unprofessional" louder than outdated information.

9. Too Many Clicks Needed: We're all impatient and in a hurry. Our online waiting threshold is much less than offline. If more than a few clicks are required to get to a page, you'll lose a web visitor every time.

10. Lack of Contact Information: This also seems obvious, but it is amazing how many times you are unable to find one. And always have a phone number available. Just because a website is online doesn't mean a prospect only wants to contact you online.

11. Form Frustration: The large majority of online forms are too lengthy. Get rid of questions/fields that simply are not needed. And don't identify one as mandatory if it really isn't.

12. No Privacy Policy: In the age of rampant spam, we all want to be certain we are offering our e-mail address to someone who will protect it carefully. If you ask for an e-mail address on one of your forms, let your prospects know that you will not sell or distribute their address to anyone.

In addition to the well-designed website, an E-newsletter is the quickest and cheapest way to distribute information. At every event and online make sure you collect email addresses and let individuals know they will be receiving club information in their inbox.

We know that not everyone is a graphic designer, but many online programs give you templates to work with. Many organizations have terrific e-newsletters without having a volunteer graphic designer on-hand, but try utilizing the skills within your club. Find members who have the ability to create and send good e-blasts. Reach out to other clubs who have newsletters and find out what software they use and how they do it.

Some example software programs are:

Constant Contact (www.constantcontact.com)

Campaign Site Builder (www.campaignsitebuilder.com)

MailChimp (www.mailchimp.com)

VerticalResponse (www.verticalresponse.com)

Here are some hints for a good YR HTML E-Newsletter

1. Make sure the information you send out in an e-newsletter is relevant, timely and well-organized. Include upcoming events, good opinion articles, YRs in the News, etc.
2. Your club name, E-newsletter name or well-known club representative's name in the "From." Recipients should recognize who the email is from instantly. It can't be deceptive in any way. If a recipient has to strain his/her brain to remember who you are, they'll click "this is spam" instead of opening.
3. A relevant subject line so the email opener instantly know who the email is from, and what it's about (hence, "subject" line).
4. The "To:" field of your email should be personalized to the recipient's name, not their email address (this can be done in most email distribution programs).
5. A one-click opt-out link that removes people from your list **MUST** be included. Consider placing it at the top of your email (or in the footer), so that people who want off your list can find it easily (instead of clicking their "this is Junk" button).
6. In addition to your opt-out link, you should also include a link in your header for recipients to "view this email in your browser." Point it to an archived version of your email on your server. This helps if the email was forwarded to friends, and the coding was messed up along the way.
7. A link to your club's website, the state's YR website and the national YR website should be in your email.
8. A valid, physical mailing address (P.O. Boxes aren't good enough), and as much contact information as possible, should be included. The more contact information you provide, the more reputable your email will look.

Promoting your Club Online

What good is it to have a well-planned meeting with great speakers at a cool location if no one shows up? Promoting events and your club includes the aforementioned website and e-newsletter, but clubs should utilize the latest social networking sites to their utmost advantage. Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn and others are great **FREE** tools for clubs to use for promotion. They are also a great way to keep track of members and prospects by "friending" them and messaging them and promoting events on the events page, forums and profiles and creating fan pages. Evite (www.evite.com) is still a great tool to use for those who are not on social networking sites, but just make sure you don't invite the same person multiple times. They will feel like they are being hounded. Additionally, send your event information/relevant news to the communications contact at your county Party and the state Party to be included in their website and e-newsletter.

And as noted before, you should still call your members and prospects. While an email or posted message is nice, a phone call allows for real conversation and builds relationships faster.

Dues

When it comes to determining members' dues, you have several options to include. You can utilize: (i) a one-size-fits-all membership, renewable each year, (ii) a reduced rate for students, (iii) multi-level memberships for those who wish to give more than the basic rate or (iv) a lifetime membership. All of these are viable options for you to consider. Remember, you want

to make your club inviting to all of those who attend. Before setting a number ask yourself a few questions. What will this money be going towards? What does it cost to run the club for the following year? What will members get for their investment in our club? Is this amount worth the investment?

One of the most successful forms of membership is the Lifetime Membership. This higher dollar membership allows a person to make a one-time membership payment to the club. This will be the last time this person pays you for membership, so do not undercharge but also be sure not to overcharge. \$50-\$100 is a good range to stay within. In addition to the lifetime memberships' enticing promise of a one-time only fee, this option also limits the amount of time you will have to spend following up with members each year asking for renewals.

Fundraising

When it comes to Young Republicans, most members are not well off and will not be the financial backbone of your club. So how will you raise the money necessary needed to achieve your club goals? Hopefully, you have made connections to your local, state and national elected officials. While some would argue that we should not ask money from our elected officials, I disagree. The Republican Party and elected officials expect the Young Republicans to be there for them and help get them elected each election year. In order for this to happen, there is not only an investment of time placed on the candidate but also an investment of money. It costs money to have t-shirts made with either the candidate or club's name on it, to pay for transportation costs to the site of the neighborhood canvassing or to set up and operate a phone bank. While most clubs help the candidate out of generosity, it is quite acceptable for the club to ask the elected official for financial support. At the end of each year, host a Young Republican Christmas Party, sponsored by your local elected officials. Each person does not have to give a lot in order to make this profitable. Several \$200 donors add up quickly. You have invested your club's time in the candidate, and so, too, should they invest in you.

Have Fun

If you haven't figured out by now, the key to a successful Young Republican club is to have fun. Politics can be boring, even to those of us who are political junkies. It is important that your members, guests and speakers have a good time. It is the easiest way to ensure that your attendees will return each month. When new, prospective members come out and have a good time they will come back, and when their friends hear about it, they might even join them at the next event. People always look for a good time. Be sure to provide it for them.