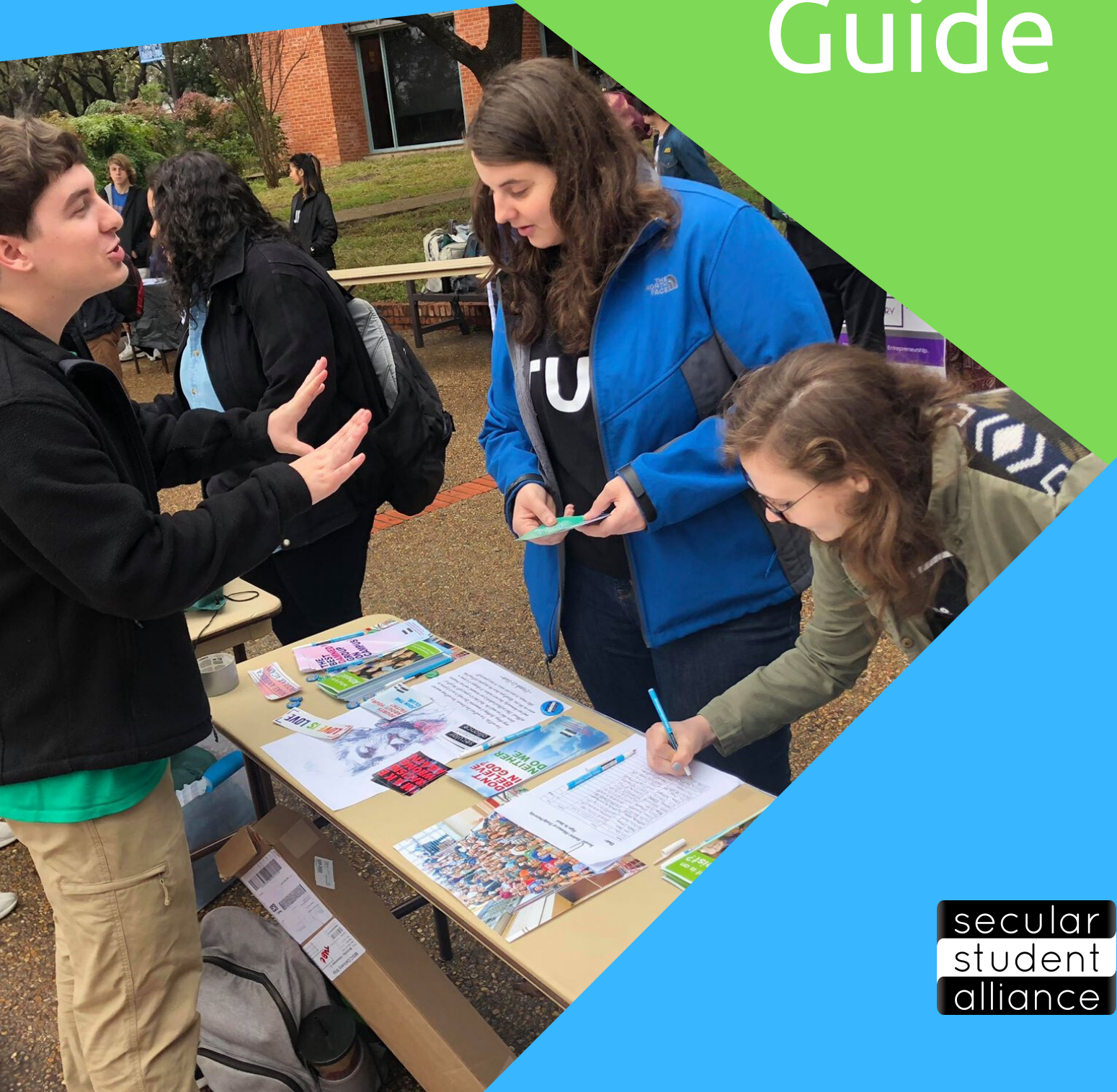


# Advisor Guide



Thank you for serving as an SSA Advisor, your work helps secular students feel at home on campus while helping them build skills for their future as secular leaders.

## Why become an SSA Advisor?

There can be over 100 religious student clubs proselytizing on college campuses! There is only one student club to provide non-religious students with a secular community. As an advisor, you have the honor of shaping the secular leaders of the future. Through providing leadership development and mentorship you can help students foster community on campus. We appreciate the hands-on support you provide students day in and day out on campus. Student leaders cycle in and out every few years, and as a result, important information about the running of the club can be lost in transition. Having a strong, committed advisor can prove highly beneficial to the long term success of a club.

## What SSA offers

- We provide opportunities for students to form lasting relationships and build meaningful community
- We connect students to fellow student leaders and opportunities within the secular movement
- We support students in their leadership development by offering catered 1-on-1 mentoring
- We provide online and physical resources to support in the day to day operations of the club
- We curate compelling and timely programs for students to implement on campus

## Where you come in

- Building Relationships
- Connect to SSA National
- Connect to Resources
- Strategic Planning
- Leadership Transition
- Documentation and Institutional Memory

# BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Most of your communication with the club will likely be with one or a handful of leaders and building a relationship of trust and open communication is key to success.

SSA chapters often draw a very diverse group of students coming from a range of backgrounds. As a result, they may not have a clear set of common beliefs or interests. Help the group harness this as an asset encouraging them to hold a wide range of activities and programs. Help them find a balance between lively discussions and debates, community service events, social outings, and events to benefit the campus at large. Doing so will ensure all secular students on campus can engage with the group

Offer to attend a meeting each semester, let the students choose which meeting would be best to introduce you. Attending a board meeting can be a great way to support the group with strategic planning. By introducing yourself to the broader group, you become a recognizable face to the group which will prove beneficial when:

- Conflict arises and a neutral party is needed for advice, especially if the President is involved, students should know there is other leadership they can consult with.
- A student is struggling with their secular identity and needs someone to confide in
- Members are transitioning to leaders, they'll have greater trust in an advisor they've already met.





# STAY CONNECTED WITH SSA NATIONAL

Make sure students are aware of the requirements to be an officially recognized club on campus and with SSA National. By registering with SSA, your club remains eligible to receive resources and support from us.

## SSA National Affiliate and Chapter Requirements

### Affiliate

- Submit our registration form with contact information for club leadership each Fall and Spring
- Maintain an online presence (Facebook Page, Group, or another way for people to engage with the club)
- Maintain official recognition as a club on campus
- Have an on-campus advisor

### Chapter

- Requirements for affiliate level and:
  - Submit a roster of 5+ members with registration form

## Key Resources

SSA National offers a ton of great resources, here are a few to keep in mind

- Annual Conference
- Scholarships
- Speakers Bureau
- Funding in the form of Project Grants
- Tabling Supplies
- Banners (Custom available for Chapters)
- Business Cards (Available for Chapters)

# MAKE CONNECTIONS

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With a greater understanding of the university and surrounding community, you can be a great resource when it comes to making connections with organizations, people, projects, and opportunities for your club members.

## On Campus

Use your connections with other departments on campus to help promote the group. Connect students with professors who may speak at their meetings. Send emails to your colleagues about upcoming SSA events and encourage them to share the information with their students.

Identify campus opportunities for secular voices to make a difference, such as interfaith initiatives, participation on advisory committees, diversity programs and social justice programs. Introduce yourself to key administrators and build relationships.

**Humanist Chaplain:** The Humanist Society website can help identify Humanist Chaplains in your local area who may be willing to provide support to your chapter.

## Off Campus

**Secular Organizations:** A contact list for active local secular organizations can help students who are seeking greater community. It can also provide leadership connections for your officers and a pipeline of speakers. Advisors can maintain a relationship with secular leaders/organizations to ensure a continuity of connection across chapter administrations.

Having support from someone who knows how things work on campus can save student time and unnecessary stress.

## Connect to Resources

**Advertising:** Does your campus have an annual programming calendar where students could add their major events? Make sure students are aware and know the deadline for submitting events. Another reason to have events you consistently host every year! Help ensure they are utilizing all opportunities at their disposal, and not just relying on social media to promote meetings and events.

**Funding:** Make sure funding opportunities don't go unclaimed, many students don't realize they can request funding from the school to put on events or attend conferences--remind students this is an option and offer to help with their funding applications.

# STRATEGIC PLANNING

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As you know, a semester and even an academic year can fly by. Offer to have a strategic planning meeting with students either as soon as they are elected or at the start of the year.

**Set Dates:** Help them set dates for major events they plan to have and ensure they are booking venues accordingly. The same goes for meetings. Setting out a consistent schedule for meetings, even including meeting topics in advance, can give them the advantage of being able to adequately advertise across campus and garner new interest. Last-minute events do little to support new member recruitment.

**Annual Events:** Having staple events that the club puts on every year is effective for several reasons. Firstly, it helps create institutional memory on campus, the club will become known for hosting XYZ event every year. Secondly, it reduces the amount of work needed to pull off a successful event because best-practices will naturally work themselves out over the years. Lastly, having a couple of staple events each year that are relatively easy to put on will ensure, regardless of the motivation and capability level of that year's leaders, some programming will indeed happen. Keep a detailed project plan on hand that records the success and pitfalls of past events.

# LEADERSHIP TRANSITION

Helping to ensure smooth leadership transitions is one of the most effective ways to ensure your club's success. One of the most frequent reasons clubs fail is because there are no new leaders to take over.

**Tips:** Include discussions around leadership transition in your strategic planning meetings. At the beginning of the year have the current leadership ask members if anyone is interested in the officer positions available. Current leaders can delegate certain tasks and take interested students under their wing throughout the year. This way when elections roll around, students will feel more confident in their ability to take on an officer position.

**When it fails . . .** When groups fail to replace graduating leaders you may be left to figure out what to do. Try to keep the club existing through the lulls in leadership. Who knows, a highly motivated freshman may start the next year ready to run the club! By keeping the club going, even if it is only holding a handful of meetings a year, you can help prevent new students from needing to start from the very beginning.

**The Veteran Leader:** Some students may run their SSA Chapter for several years, while this isn't inherently problematic, it can prevent new leaders from blossoming. Help veteran leaders become mentors to younger students. They can even maintain the position of president while they do this. If they have run the club for awhile they likely know the ins and outs of campus and can pull off large events with relative ease. Find out what they find most enjoyable about being a leader and have them lean into that. Meanwhile, encourage them to bring younger members on board in discussions about the day to day running of the group. Help re-frame the experience from them "giving up power" towards them helping to ensure the club continues to run successfully after their departure.



Use our Building Communities of Belonging rituals to help make leadership a fun, engaging, and meaningful process.

Visit  
[secularstudents.org/belonging](https://secularstudents.org/belonging)  
for more info



**What's Available:**  
New Member Buttons  
New Leader Pins  
Graduation Honor Cords

# DOCUMENTATION AND INSTITUTIONAL MEMORY

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## What to Keep Track of:

- Constitution
- Bylaws
- Annual Goals
- Event Reports
- Officer Succession Folders
- Budgets
- Event Posters
- Photos
- Passwords and Login Info for
  - Facebook or other social media accounts (See if they'll add you as an admin so you'll have continued access)
  - Group email address
  - Website
  - Bank Accounts

One aspect of your role as an advisor is to help ensure documentation and institutional memory are passed on to future leaders in order to ensure the long term survival and success of the group.

**Documentation** is very important in order to foster successful leadership transitions and to make sure that new leaders retain as much information as possible from previous leaders. Chapter leaders often underestimate how much information regarding processes, methods, and best practices they retain only in their memory. This information needs to be put down in a form accessible to other leaders of the chapter, both current and future. Google Docs is a free resource that many of our chapters find useful as a place to aggregate the history and procedures of their chapter. It is also important for you to help the chapter pass along the access to these documents to future leaders. We encourage you to retain the usernames and passwords of important accounts such as Google, Facebook, and Twitter. If there is a gap in leadership, you will be able to share this vital information with the next leader, as needed.

**School Policy:** As an advisor you can help the group by serving as a liason with administration and help interpret school policy and procedure. Stay informed on relevant club dates and deadlines, like when they need to register to be involved with the annual club fair.



# ADVISOR BEST PRACTICES

**1. Offer Public Support:** Do your best to attend group functions and keep up with the latest events.

**2. Offer Private Support:** Are you willing to spend time with the group, either attending meetings/events or online? Can you talk to other professors about the group? Are you willing to help student leaders with bumps in the road? Sometimes groups have special needs that you can help with, such as chaperoning for special events or conferences.

**3. Offer to Speak:** Student groups are often tight on funds, and can use help anywhere they can. If there's something you can talk about (say, your research or classroom material), offer to do a presentation for a discussion meeting! Perhaps offer incentives for your students to come to a relevant lecture outside of class hosted by the group. If you aren't up for speaking yourself, you may know other professors with related research who might be interested. See if you can connect them with the group.

**4. Engage and Mentor:** Don't be a stranger! A lot of student activity takes place at the group meetings, but social media is also a key hub for groups. Don't hesitate to join in on discussions and bring something to the table. The group will feel more comfortable coming to you if they know who you are. Keep in mind, running a student group can be stressful. Be available for advice and words of encouragement if they are needed.

**5. Stay Close, But Not Too Close!** Be accessible and available to the students, but don't try to run the group! Remember that you are in a supporting role. At the same time, don't abandon the group entirely to their own devices. Many of our groups tell us they wish their advisors were more involved in supporting the group and attending functions. Take the time to be aware of resources and build relationships so that you can be there for students when they need assistance.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

VISIT: [secularstudents.org/resources-for-advisors-and-educators](https://secularstudents.org/resources-for-advisors-and-educators)

Or email us at: [organizer@secularstudents.org](mailto:organizer@secularstudents.org)

## SIGN UP FOR OUR NEWSLETTER

VISIT: [secularstudents.org/this-week](https://secularstudents.org/this-week)

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