



ELECTION SEASON ACTIVISM GUIDE

Election Season Activism Guide

Every four years, as the nation considers who will be elected the next President of the United States, students around the country are given the opportunity to engage their communities in order to create a conversation, educate citizens, and provide people with the tools necessary to help our democracy grow.

The Junior State of America will be promoting election season activism through various initiatives over the course of the next few months. Chapters will be encouraged to hold voter registration drives, debate-watching parties, and mock elections (as well as develop independent activism initiatives). These initiatives will allow for students and adults alike to become more informed on the issues and to prepare them to vote (even if they might not be eligible to vote this election cycle).

In this packet, you will find the initiative instructions, how-to guides, sample letters, and tips for how to make your chapter's activism events successful. This year, I want to provide chapters with the flexibility necessary to make these activism initiatives truly successful, so you do not need to take these tips as rigid guidelines, but as general suggestions. Your chapter should always be developing its own activism events, such as letter-writing campaigns. With that said, I hope that you enjoy implementing these initiatives in your communities and making a difference this election season.

Sincerely,
Michael Mintz
National Director of Activism

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September Initiative: Voter Registration Drives

In order to call ourselves a true democracy, it is vital that all Americans actively participate in the electoral process. According to a July 2012 Census Report, 71% of voting-age citizens were registered to vote in 2008. We not only have to register the 29% of citizens who failed to register in 2008, but new adults who over the past four years have become eligible to vote (less than half of voters in the 18-24 age group voted in 2008).

Voter registration drives allow JSA chapters to easily sign up mass amounts of eligible voters prior to an election. They can be held at your school, your church, sidewalks, or any JSA event which you chapter is holding. **Make sure to receive any necessary permits and permissions before holding a voter registration drive.** We recommend holding any registration drives in September, or very early October, due to registration deadlines. However, voter registration drive are encouraged to be held throughout the year, especially to register high school seniors for any elections being held in 2013.

How To Hold A Voter Registration Drive

Step 1: Research the voter registration laws in your state

Before you begin planning your chapter's voter registration drive, it is important that you research important information regarding your state and local election laws regarding voter registration (especially this year, as many states are adopting new voting laws). You can go to fec.gov and eac.gov for voter registration forms and to register people over the Internet.

Step 2: Contact local officials and organizations

Your county clerk and local board of registrars will be important resources for how local voter registration works. In addition, the League of Womens Voters is an extremely active organization in voter registration and can be great partners who can make your drive a success. They can give you tips, resources, and volunteers which can be invaluable given the short time frame. They also have an in-depth voter registration guide which your chapter might find useful (it can be found [here](#)). A sample letter to the League of Womens Voters is attached below.

Step 3: Choose a location and date for your drive

As stated earlier, if you wish to have your registered voters eligible to vote for the November presidential election, we highly recommend having your drive in September. Otherwise, you may not be able to register in time for the deadline (often at the beginning of October). Make sure to research when your state's voter registration deadline is. As for picking a location, local colleges can be great locations to reach out to young voting-age citizens and register them. High schools are not optimal locations in September due to the fact that not many seniors will be eligible to vote, though you can have voter registration drives later in the year to get seniors registered. Public locations are preferable to maximize the amount of registered voters, but it is important to get permission from whichever municipality you choose to hold your drive in.

Step 4: Advertise your drive

The week of your drive, you should begin setting up flyers (with permission) in the area you plan to hold your drive. Make sure that people know about your drive to ensure high attendance. Having a notice in your local newspaper can be a great way of advertising your event. A sample flyer is attached below.

Step 5: Hold your drive

On the day of the drive, make sure that you have all the proper forms necessary. If you plan on registering voters through the internet, make sure you have enough laptops and a secure internet connection. **Most importantly, have a printed, visible notice that state "Our voter registration services are available without regard to voters' political preference".** Make sure you have enough volunteers for the day and organize all of your forms so nothing is lost. Once your drive is finished, research where you should mail or drop off your forms (the League of Womens Voters can answer questions such as these).

Sample Letter to the League of Womens Voters

Date

To Whom It May Concern:

Hello, my name is **Insert Name Here** and I am writing this letter on behalf of Bergen County Academies Chapter of the Junior State of America. We are a student run, non-profit, non-partisan political awareness organization that seeks to get high school students interested and involved in politics and government. JSA allows students to voice their opinions on important issues and determine their own political beliefs.

This month, our chapter wishes to hold a voter registration drive to increase voter turnout on November 6th. Given the League of Womens Voters' involvement with voter registration drives, we were interested in seeing if you would be able to provide any resources or suggestions for our drive (optimal dates, locations, etc.). In addition, if you have any members who would be interested in volunteering at our drive, please let us know. Having a contact at the League of Womens Voters would be extremely helpful for providing us with information we may need throughout the process.

We look forward to hearing back from you and the League of Womens Voters. We admire the dedication that your organization has devoted to ensuring that voting-age citizens are registered and prepared to vote. The Junior State of America shares the passion to spread the values of democracy through increased voter registration and we hope that this event will create a lasting relationship between our organizations.

Sincerely,

Name

Position

Junior State of America

www.jsa.org

Email:

Phone:

Sample Flyer

REGISTER TO VOTE



***Insert Chapter Name* JSA Voter Registration Drive**
September 20th, 12-5 PM
123 Generic Ave
Somewhere, NJ

To vote in the 2012 Presidential Election, you must be a United States citizen and 18 years of age by November 6th

October Initiative: Debate Watch Parties

One of the hallmarks of JSA is the discussion of important issues which we as JSAers find relevant. The Presidential and Vice-Presidential debates of October provide chapters with the opportunity to debate issues, as well as discuss the debates of the candidates themselves. This creates an environment for students and parents alike where an informed decision can be made by analyzing the positions and policies of the different candidates.

Chapters are given plenty of flexibility to organize their viewing parties. For example, some chapters might choose to turn it into a potluck dinner at their local high schools, while others would make it a get together at a local restaurant. Inviting parents and speakers are great ways of setting the stage for an informed discussion between members of different generations (as well as an opportunity to show parents what JSA is all about). Most importantly, make sure that your debate viewing party is not just informative, but a fun chapter bonding experience.

How To Host A Debate Viewing Party

Step 1: Choose a location and date

You will need a location where you can get live TV and fit enough students. A high school library or auditorium usually works very well, because students know where it is and usually live nearby. Be sure to get school approval well in advance as well as a teacher willing to supervise. Also make sure you can bring food in there. A pizza place or other restaurant might work as well but is usually more complicated. The dates of the Presidential debates are **October 3rd**, **October 16th**, and **October 22nd**, while the Vice-Presidential Debate is on **October 11th**. Due to the fact that all debates are on weekdays, you may want to consider recording the debate and then showing it on a Friday night. The only danger with that is that people may have already seen the debate, so use your judgment. Tell people to arrive at least a half hour before the debate starts so that they have plenty of time to get food, talk with friends, and get settled. Some chapters who host viewing parties choose to have one or two blocks of debate before the debates themselves, which can be a great way of breaking the ice (especially if parents are invited to the event). In this case, chapters and parents should arrive an hour or so prior to the start of the debate itself.

Step 2: Invite Speakers

Mail out invitation letters to potential speakers on JSA letterhead (a sample letter is attached below). Be sure to fax or mail the letter first and then follow up with a phone call to their office. Don't expect the speakers to call you back. Since you will be watching a debate between two or more candidates, ideal speakers would be representatives from their campaigns or parties. Local elected officials or candidates are also great, as are political analysts such as political science professors. The key is to set up a panel of about 3 or 4 people with several varying viewpoints that can intelligently discuss the debate and the election. Invite enough speakers to be sure you have some but be wary of inviting too many at once as you may then have a panel which is too large and not have enough time for student questions. The ideal is to send out speaker invitation letters in waves, first inviting the speakers you want the most and if they can't come, then sending out invitations to other speakers. Beware: some speakers (especially if you send invitations to party headquarters) will just show up without confirming, and you may end up with more speakers than you thought you would have. Have an item, such as a gavel or a JSA mug, to thank the speaker with. As stated in Step 1, depending on what events you have (debate blocks, speaker blocks), make sure the arrival time is appropriate.

Step 3: Send out requests for food donations (one month before event)

Free food is a very important part of a debate viewing party, as it is a good way to attract attendees. Many grocery store chains give their managers the discretion to give out gift certificates to non-profits without going through their corporate office; these are the ones you want to target. If a chain has several stores in an area, you can usually ask them all separately and thus multiply your donations. Put together a list of local stores and addresses and write a form letter (sample attached) to them. Then make follow up calls and ask to speak with the managers, don't expect them to have read or even kept your letter so explain what you are doing and what you need. Often they will ask you to re-fax the letter or bring it with you to the store. Chips and other snack food is always good, trying to get a whole meal together is usually too complicated. Another easy way to have food is to advertise your event as a potluck dinner, encouraging chapters and parents to bring a dish of food to the event.

Step 4: Publicize your event (one month before event)

Make flyers for your event (include date, location, map, as well as mention the added bonuses of food, debates, and speaker) and e-mail them to the chapter presidents in your region so they can put them up around their school and print some out yourself and post them all over your school and in classrooms. Also have them included in the monthly JSA mailing. If your school's PTO has a newsletter, make sure to have a notice advertising the event. Go around to history/government/civics teachers and ask them to put up a poster in their room and talk to their class about it. If you can get these teachers to offer extra credit for attending, you will see a sharp rise in attendees. Bug everyone you know to come and continually bug your chapter presidents over e-mail and the phone so that they don't forget when and where it is. Just sending it out once won't get them to do much. Though some chapter presidents will be very proactive in getting their chapter involved, many will not, so it is necessary to constantly reminding them. Ultimately, you are the main force who will bring attendees to the event, not other chapter presidents. Since your fellow chapter members and people at your school are the ones you can have the most direct contact with, make sure everyone at your school knows that the debate viewing party is on, go personally talk to teachers to try to get extra credit, advertise on your campus news, and ensure that your event is continually being advertised.

Step 5: Send out expansion letters

Debate viewing parties are also a great expansion tool. Put together a list of schools in your area without JSA chapters and get the names of history or government teachers on their school websites, and record the teacher's names and the school addresses. Then send your viewing party flyer as well as a What is JSA brochure and a letter (sample attached) explaining JSA and inviting them to come to your event. This may seem like it has very little return because for every 20 schools you send stuff to you will probably only have one new school come, but it takes very little effort and it is worth it if you can get even one more school to get interested in starting a JSA chapter.

Step 6: Logistics (two weeks prior)

Be sure your speakers and food donations are confirmed. Confirm location and TV and all logistics. Make new flyer with your speakers on it. Renew efforts at publicity and extra credit searching. Call chapter presidents to remind them of the debate viewing party. Making an agenda for your event is always a great way to give off a sense of professionalism

Step 7: Send a press release to your local newspapers and TV stations

The press often covers the debates and is interested in hearing student reactions, so contacting local newspapers and stations is a great way to increase your chapter's publicity. (A sample press release is attached below).

Step 8: One week until event

Call chapter presidents again, ask for attendance estimates from their chapters. Deal with last minute panics. Make sure TV can actually get live television. If you are having debate blocks, have your debates and agenda written and ready to be printed.

Step 9: Two days until event

Ensure that everybody in your chapter knows their assignments for the viewing party. Last minute logistics, such as food preparations, setup times, decorations, should be taken into account.

Step 10: Day of event

Make sure that there is a registration desk at your event to keep track of attendees and to hand out agendas/pamphlets. The decorations should be set up at least an hour prior to the start of the event. Depending on when the debates air in your area, you will either have debate blocks/speakers before or after the debates themselves. Ensure that the setup of the room is optimal (easy access to food, large viewing area for the debates, etc.). From then on in, follow the agenda your chapter has set and be prepared to make some last-minute changes if anything goes wrong. If members of the press arrive, be sure to be gracious to them for covering the event. Some fun ideas for the viewing of the debates is to have “Debate Bingo”, made up of common terms or rhetoric the candidates will use (you can slip them into the agendas and hand out pencils when the debates begin). Once the event is over, thank everyone for coming and clean up as quickly as possible. If there are janitors helping you clean up, let them have some of the leftover food to create a good rapport with them (it always helps to have the janitors on your side!).

Step 11: Follow up

Have a member of your chapter write an article for the school newspaper detailing the success of your event! It is nice to also e-mail everyone who came afterwards and thank them for coming and let them know about other JSA opportunities ahead.

Sample Speaker Invitation Letter

Date

Dear **Speaker's Name**:

Hello, my name is **Your Name** and I am writing on behalf of the **School Name** chapter of the Junior State of America. We are a student run, non-profit, non-partisan political awareness organization that seeks to get high school students interested and involved in politics and government. JSA allows students to voice their opinions on important issues and determine their own political beliefs.

On **Date**, about 60 students from _____ counties will meet at **Location** to watch and discuss the **Presidential/Vice Presidential** debate. This will be a great way to bring students together and hold an informed discussion on the election, the issues, and what we can do about it. Meanwhile, JSA chapters and regions across the nation will be holding similar events so that we can measure the opinion of youth in elections nationwide. We hope to have speakers from both parties speak to us after the debate. It would mean a lot to us if you could join us in watching the debate and speak to us afterwards about who you believe won the debate and what it will mean for the election. Our event will take place on date, at **Time** at **Location**.

These days, many Americans do not even bother to show up at the voting polls, but these students will be giving up their **Day of the week** night to learn, discuss, and become involved in the issues they care about. By speaking to us, you will be showing the youth that even though we cannot yet vote, our ideas are worth listening to, and our involvement is important. Democracy cannot function without informed citizens. America's youth will be the citizens of tomorrow.

For seventy-five years, The Junior State has sponsored political awareness activities on high school campuses across the country. Our events provide an opportunity for students to participate in organized debates, listen to current political leaders speak, and learn more about the world around them. JSA debates, conventions, regional events, chapter meetings are organized and run by dedicated high school students.

We will contact you to follow up on this matter. Thank you so much.

Sincerely,

Your Name
Position
Junior State of America
www.jsa.org
Email
Phone Number

Sample Food Donations Letter

Date

To Whom It May Concern:

Hello, my name is **Your Name** and I am writing this letter on behalf of **School Name** Chapter of the Junior State of America. We are a student run, non-profit, non-partisan political awareness organization that seeks to get high school students interested and involved in politics and government. JSA allows students to voice their opinions on important issues and determine their own political beliefs.

On **Date**, about 60 students from _____ counties will meet at **Location** to watch and discuss the second presidential debate. We will also have representatives from both political parties speak to us afterwards. This will be a great way to bring students together and hold an informed discussion on the presidential election, the issues, and what we can do about it. Meanwhile, JSA chapters and regions across the nation will be holding similar events so that we can measure the opinion of youth in this election nationwide. Any tax-deductible donation of food you could give us would be much appreciated.

These days, many Americans do not even bother to show up at the voting polls, but these students will be giving up their **Day of week** night to learn, discuss, and become involved in the issues they care about. By providing food or a donation of your choice, you would be showing the youth that even though we cannot yet vote, our ideas are worth listening to, and our involvement is important. Democracy cannot function without informed citizens. America's youth will be the citizens of tomorrow.

For seventy-five years, The Junior State has sponsored political awareness activities on high school campuses across the country. Our events provide an opportunity for students to participate in organized debates, listen to current political leaders speak, and learn more about the world around them. JSA debates, conventions, regional events, chapter meetings are organized and run by dedicated high school students.

We will contact you to follow up on this matter. Thank you so much.

Sincerely,

Name

Position

Junior State of America

www.jsa.org

Email:

Phone:

Sample Expansion Letter

Date

To Whom It May Concern:

Hello, my name is **Your Name** and I am writing this letter on behalf of the **School Name** Chapter of the Junior State of America. We are a student run, non-profit, non-partisan political awareness organization that seeks to get high school students interested and involved in politics and government. JSA allows students to voice their opinions on important issues and determine their own political beliefs.

On **Date**, about 60 students from _____ counties will meet at 5:30 pm at **Location** to watch and discuss the second presidential debate. We will also have representatives from both political parties speak to us afterwards. This will be a great way to bring students together and hold an informed discussion on the presidential election, the issues, and what we can do about it. The event will be free and some snacks will be provided but if students want dinner they should bring a couple of dollars for pizza. Meanwhile, JSA chapters and regions across the nation will be holding similar events so that we can measure the opinion of youth in this election nationwide.

We encourage faculty and administrators at local high schools to encourage their students to attend our event or hold their own in order to increase understanding of the political process. Please review the enclosed flyer to learn more about debate viewing parties and how to hold one. If you have any other questions, please contact me and I would be happy to help with anything you need.

Another great way to get your students involved in the political process is to encourage a small group of students to start a Junior State Chapter at your school. Chapters focus on holding once a week meetings in order to discuss political topics. In addition to holding the meetings in high schools across the nation, we also have state and regional conferences several times a year. Our events provide an opportunity for students to participate in organized debates, listen to current political leaders speak, and learn more about the world around them. All of our debates, conventions, regional events, and chapter meetings are organized and run by dedicated high school students. For more information, please look at the enclosed "What Is JSA Flyer", visit our website, or contact me. Thank you very much for your time.

Sincerely,

Name
Position
Junior State of America
www.jsa.org
Email:
Phone:

Sample Press Release

MEDIA ADVISORY

Date

Event: Dos Pueblos JSA Debate Watch Party
Contact: Fred Smith; (805) 555-1234, fred.smith@jsa.org
Date: October 3, 2012
Location: Dos Pueblos High School Library
Time: 5:30 p.m.

STUDENTS TO WATCH OBAMA AND ROMNEY DEBATE

(Goleta, CA)— Tri-county high school students meet to discuss presidential debates, hear candidates speak. The Dos Pueblos High Chapter of the Junior State of America will be holding a Debate Watch party on October 3, 2012 to watch the presidential debate and hear speakers from both political parties and the media, including (INSERT SPEAKERS).

The group will be meeting at (LOCATION) from (TIME). The Junior State of America is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that is dedicated to teaching high school students about democracy and is the largest student-run organization in the United States. For more information, contact Fred Smith at (805) 555-1111 or fred.smith@jsa.org.

BCA JSA PRESENTS:

DEBATE POTLUCK



**BRING YOUR FAMILY AND FRIENDS TO WATCH THE 1ST PRESIDENTIAL
DEBATE ON TUESDAY, OCTOBER 3RD**

**WE WILL BE DEBATING AND EATING FROM 7-9 PM
TELEVISED DEBATE BEGINS AT 9 PM**

BERGEN COUNTY ACADEMIES UPPER CAFETERIA

November Initiative: Mock Elections

Apathy is one of the greatest problems which activists of our generation will have to confront. While youth turnout was higher in 2008 than it has been in previous years, the youth vote is still the lowest out of the voting population. Often times, high schoolers do not feel that they need to care about the issues and are often afraid of expressing their opinions. Mock elections (and the activities leading up to such an event) would be an appropriate forum for students to inform themselves of and debate the issues.

Mock elections, with the help of an administration, are easier in the sense that you do not have to worry about attendance counts or getting other chapters to attend. You can often times hold one on Election Day in the cafeteria or in history classrooms throughout the school. This guide will provide you with tips to make the event a truly informative and engaging experience.

How To Hold A Mock Election

Step 1: Contact your administration

The first step for any mock election is to see if your school would permit you to hold a mandatory school-wide event. Schedule a meeting with your school administrators and discuss with them the values of a mock election and the importance of fighting apathy through the creation of a discussion of the issues. Conduct yourself in a professional manner and make sure not to disrespect the administrators. Even if they don't allow you to hold a mandatory event in the auditorium or gym of your school, you always have other options.

Step 2: Contact history/government/civics teachers

By contacting various teachers, you can find ways to build hype for the election, as well as ways to stage debates surrounding the platform of the different political parties. In addition, should you fail to get approval for a mandatory mock election, you can ask the history department if they would take their classes to the room the election is being held in and have their students vote.

Step 3: Order supplies for the event/Logistics

If you want your mock election to be as professional as it can be, you can go online and order/rent voting booths to use on the day of the election. Your chapter will have to decide how it wants to run the election. For example, many chapters might opt for paper ballots to be counted up in person. However, if anyone in your chapter is interested in creating a computer program, you can have an electronic voting system within the booth to make counting easier and more realistic. You should also receive permission to whichever facility you will be using to hold the election (gym, auditorium, cafeteria, etc.).

Step 4: Build hype for the election

There are various ways in which your chapter can build hype for the election. The first would be to stage several pre-election events, such as debates. Have members of your chapter write opinion pieces in your school newspaper debating the positions of the various candidates. Use your contacts in the history/government department to have them debate election issues within the classroom to help students make an informed decision on November 6th. If your school has morning announcements, make sure to be a part of them. While you don't necessarily need to have a large advertising campaign, due to the fact that students will most likely be voting as part of their history class or a mandatory assembly, it is still good to have a few posters showing to build your chapter's reputation within your school.

Step 5: Election Day

Make sure to have volunteers signed up to help set up for the event. As early as possible, set up the voting booths and ballots so students will be able to walk right in and vote. If you are running an assembly (which might consist of a JSA style debate in front of the whole school), you should have the logistics figured out at least a week in advance. Make sure that all teachers and administrators are on board. Remind your volunteers to remain nonpartisan while students cast their votes. When the school day is over (or whenever the voting period is over), have volunteers count up the votes and determine the winner of the election. Follow up through whichever announcement method is most used in your school to inform students of who won the election (and compare it to the general election results). Have a member of your chapter write an article in the school newspaper analyzing the results of the election.