PART OF THE JSA CHAPTER STARTUP SERIES

STARTING A JUNIOR STATE CHAPTER
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JUNIOR STATE OF AMERICA WELCOMES YOU!

A SUCCESSFUL JUNIOR STATE CHAPTER is well worth the effort. It can bring political awareness to an apathetic high school campus, unite communities through a common cause, and alter students’ lives and viewpoints. This step-by-step guide will lead you through the process of starting a JSA Chapter. If you have questions about starting a chapter, please contact the National Headquarters at 1-800-334-5353.

Contact the Junior State Office

Contact the Junior State National headquarters to obtain copies of the Junior State Handbook, a tax form, and detailed literature describing the Junior State of America (JSA) and its upcoming events. Show this to your friends, even if you think they “wouldn’t be interested in this sort of thing.” JSA isn’t just about politics; it’s about being involved in our nation and promoting the issues that matter to you.

Find a Teacher Advisor

Every chapter must have a Teacher Advisor to accompany students to conventions and supervise chapter meetings. Your Teacher Advisor is your link to the school administration; teachers help explain to your administration exactly what your JSA chapter is doing. Make sure that he or she will be actively involved. If you are having trouble finding a Teacher Advisor, try your social studies department chair. For teachers with little time, emphasize that JSA is student-run, and that you or other student leaders will do most of the work. Suggest that they contact the Junior State office for any other assistance, and always be friendly and polite.

The Founders’ Meeting

Call a well-planned meeting of all interested students to organize your chapter. This “Founders’ meeting” should include your Teacher Advisor and three or four involved students. Get them excited for your new chapter, give them a good understanding of JSA, and gain commitment for the rest of your year.

Approval From Your Administration

Work with your administration, become familiar with school policies, rules and procedures; find out whose approval you need, how to get equipment or a place to meet, what form needs to be filled out. New clubs often must submit chapter constitutions for student government approval. Connect with your principal and director of student activities, establish a good relationship, and get school approval for your chapter. Administrators may be very helpful supporters of your JSA chapter once they see what it accomplishes, so make sure they understand JSA’s positive impact on students.

Find Potential Members

Get student leaders interested! Speak to government, speech, and history classes; approach the Honor Society, Debate Team, and Journalism Staff. Ask teachers for names of politically interested students, but aim for diversity so all new members bring unique perspectives and feel welcome.
Formulate a Chapter Constitution

A sample constitution and guidelines for an acceptable constitution can be found later in this packet’s “Writing a Chapter Constitution” section; you may copy and edit the framework or create a unique one. All constitutions must adhere to the Fundamental Principles listed in the sample constitution of this guide and to school rules, but the rest is up to you. Email or mail your chapter Constitution to a JSA national office; unless you hear back quickly, assume it’s approval.

The First Meeting

Call a well-planned meeting of potential members to promote and organize your new chapter. It should be engaging and interesting but productive so potential members take your club seriously. Make sure you attract underclassmen to ensure sustainability. JSA student leaders from other high schools are often available to come to your meetings to relate the Junior State experience and give advice. You may contact these students through the Junior State Office.

Collect Taxes, Be Recognized

Send your annual taxes (membership fees) of $5 per member to the Junior State Office via check or credit card in the mail or credit card over the phone with your ratified constitution (save your own copy, too). After sending taxes for at least eight members and registering these members on the MyJSA system, your chapter will officially be a part of JSA. Elect chapter officers and set up an event calendar.

Chapter Activities

Publicize your new chapter at school and in the community. Start organizing diverse chapter activities such as: traditional debates, thought talks, activism projects, informal discussions, structured debates, educational simulations, challenging mock trials, informative political guest speakers, or voter registration drives. You can also seek support from civic organizations in your community, like the Kiwanis Club, Optimist Club, Rotary Club, Lions Club and the League of Women Voters. Recruit chapter leaders (again, focus on underclassmen) for the years to come so your hard work has lasting impact. Don’t be afraid to ask for their help in planning activities; many times they will be flattered and more willing to help in the future.
Writing Your Chapter Constitution

Constitution Overview

Writing a chapter constitution is simple. You are free to structure your chapter as long as it remains a democracy; four elected officers and some appointed cabinet members make up the traditional structure. You must follow the “Fundamental Principles,” listed in the sample constitution of this guide and the Junior State Handbook as well as school rules.

Chapter constitutions must include:

- **Preamble:** State the purposes and goals of your chapter.
- **Name:** State the name of your chapter.
- **Membership:** Indicate how you become a member.
- **Officers:** Decide what officers your chapter will need. Some chapters use traditional titles of president, secretary, etc., and others pattern their titles after local government. List your officers, specify their duties, and state how they will be selected.
- **Activities:** Specify how often the chapter will meet, how these meetings take place, and who presides over them.
- **Amendments and Ratification:** Describe how the Constitution may be adopted and amended. Including people with different points of view will strengthen your constitution. Also, while general guidelines should be clear, your constitution must be flexible and withstand change. What should be left to new leadership, and what should remain constant? A good constitution should last decades.
Sample Chapter Constitution

Constitution of the Washington High School Chapter of the Junior State.

PREAMBLE

We, the citizens of the Washington High School Chapter of the Junior State, in order to achieve high standards of citizenship, improve our understanding of democratic processes, develop responsibility in the individual, and promote involvement in community affairs, do establish this organization.

ARTICLE I: NAME

The name of this organization shall be “The Washington High School Chapter of the Junior State.”

ARTICLE II: MEMBERSHIP

Membership will be granted to all students who have paid their annual membership tax and are attending Washington High School.

ARTICLE III: OFFICERS

Section A

Any student may run for office provided that the person is a chapter member in good standing.

Section B

The officers shall be elected by secret ballot at the second to last meeting of the elected term. The candidate receiving a majority of votes cast shall be declared the winner. If no candidate received a majority, the candidate receiving the fewest votes shall be dropped from the ballot and a new election shall commence. The process shall continue until a candidate receives a majority of the votes cast.

Section C

The term of the officers shall start June 1 and end the following May 31. In the case of a vacant position, the President may appoint a replacement with the approval of a majority of the chapter. If the President resigns or is impeached, the Vice President becomes President.

Section D

There shall be four (4) elected officers:

1. The President is the chief executive officer of the chapter and is responsible for representing the chapter at all events. The President will preside over all meetings and be a member of all committees. (S)he is responsible for running the chapter’s educational program. The President may appoint other officers as the need arises.

2. The Vice President assists the President and becomes President if there is a vacancy in that position.

3. The Secretary will keep minutes of all the meetings. The Secretary will record and maintain all chapter records.

4. The Treasurer will be in charge of all financial matters of the chapter. The Treasurer will collect monies and keep records of members attending state and regional Junior State events. The Treasurer will prepare a financial report ready at all chapter meetings.

Any officer may be removed by a two-thirds vote of chapter members present and voting, provided that notice has been given that this motion will be considered.

Section E

The chapter will have a Teacher Advisor in accordance with the rules and regulations of Washington High School. The Teacher Advisor will provide educational guidance, supervision and serve as a liaison to the Washington High School administration and faculty.

ARTICLE IV: ACTIVITIES

A. The chapter shall meet a minimum of twice a month during the school year. Meetings may be called by either the President or the Teacher Advisor.

B. All meetings shall be run according to Robert’s Rules of Order.

ARTICLE V: AMENDMENTS

A. This Constitution may be amended by a two-thirds vote of the chapter members.

ARTICLE VI: RATIFICATION

A. This constitution shall take effect upon ratification by a two-thirds vote of the chapter and approval of the Junior State Governor.
Chapter Structure

Tips to Structure Your Chapter

Take advantage of your people and resources
Consider each member’s skills and talents. A fantastic writer could write a chapter sponsored column in the school newspaper. A strong orator could train new debaters. A creative artist could design outreach posters. The opportunities are endless.

Set goals
Discuss what needs improvement, create a solution, and set goals for its implementation. A chapter may have good meetings, but low turnout, so it may set better publicity as one of its main goals and appoint a cabinet member to work specifically on publicity.

Keep it simple
Some think that elaborate councils and complicated structures strengthen their chapter, but a simple structure with clearly defined responsibilities is most efficient. Less bureaucracy will prevent confusion and keep people accountable.

Clearly define who is responsible for different tasks
If a chapter doesn’t define who is responsible for each of its tasks, jobs are left undone. Compile a list of all major tasks that the chapter must do (planning meetings, convention registration, financial records, etc.), then decide who will take care of each, spreading work evenly.

Make it easy for your Teacher Advisor
Your Teacher Advisor is there to help you when needed and can be fundamental to your chapter’s success. However, Teacher Advisors are volunteering their time and energy to help your chapter, so please make everything as easy as possible for them. Be sure that your Teacher Advisor is consulted before any decision is made and before any meetings or programs are announced.

Be adaptable
In the course of a year, people may resign, your Teacher Advisor may change, school rules may change, other clubs may form, etc. Creating a resilient chapter structure helps your chapter take things in stride.

Different Parts of a JSA Chapter

The Chapter President
The Chapter President must be able to make informed decisions and motivate others, delegate work, and listen to others. This individual must have respect from both students and faculty, and be trusting and honest with their Teacher Advisor. Chapter Presidents serve as the official leader of their chapter and may appoint a chapter cabinet to help run their JSA chapter the best they can. High-quality meetings must be called regularly. A Chapter President may receive informational mailings and phone calls throughout the year and is responsible for chapter taxes, convention registration, delegation leadership and conduct during events.

The Chapter Cabinet
The chapter’s engine, chapter cabinet members may be appointed or elected (depending on the chapter’s constitution). Chapter leaders determine which Cabinet positions will work best for the chapter that year. Some of the common positions are described on the next page.
The Vice President
The Vice President serves next in line to the Chapter President. (S)he is expected to assist the Chapter President and take over if there is a vacancy in the Presidency. Vice Presidents are usually elected.

The Treasurer
The Treasurer is responsible for all financial matters of the chapter. (S)he must manage the chapter’s bank account, keep records of financial transactions, and follow school policies relating to club finances. A Treasurer should be especially competent and trustworthy.

The Secretary
The Secretary records minutes at chapter meetings and assists with chapter projects and meetings. (S)he is frequently responsible for communication with chapter members and parents.

Debate Director
The Debate Director ensures quality chapter debates and assists with chapter projects and meetings. (S)he is frequently responsible for communication with chapter members and parents.

Fundraising Director
The Fundraising Director plans, schedules, and runs the chapter’s fundraising efforts for the year, frequently with the end goal of event attendance. (S)he must be an effective motivator.

Chapter Historian
Solely dedicated to keeping a history of the chapter and its events, the Historian should be creative and understand the value of having lasting records. The Historian may also want to take photographs and collect other items in a chapter scrapbook.

Other Officers
In the states with State Assemblies or Houses of Representatives, each chapter selects one or more chapter representatives in either the Assembly or House. For more information of these positions, contact your State Speaker, or Lieutenant Governor, or the Junior State office.

Being a Leader

Making Decisions
A leader knows which decisions to let others make and which decisions to make him or herself. Consult others while making decisions so they feel valued and will carry out your chapter’s plans. Remember that you represent your chapter.

Setting Goals
Evaluate your chapter’s progress and find ways your chapter can improve more throughout the year. Think optimistically, plan pragmatically, and document these goals--don’t let them disappear.

Assuming Responsibility
For many, the most difficult idea of being a leader is personal responsibility. As Chapter President, you are the highest authority within the chapter. Do not undervalue yourself. The fact that you are reading this guide shows that you can and will be a responsible leader. At the same time, surround yourself with trustworthy, competent individuals to whom you can properly delegate work so everyone is involved and contributing.
Making Mistakes
Every leader will, at some point, make mistakes. People will have respect for you if you assume responsibility, admit your mistakes, try to fix them, and move on, thereby improving your chapter and yourself.

Avoid Power Struggles
Power struggles are extremely destructive -- a chapter needs unity to reach full potential. Most power struggles result in both sides losing. Remember to compromise; leaders cannot be too strong willed or nothing will be accomplished. If your opposition sees you are considering their points and looking out for the good of the chapter, they are likely to do the same for you.

Time Management
Delegate if someone can do something as well as or better than you can; save your time and energy for those tasks at which you are best. Additionally, use time efficiently; little pieces of time add up quickly. Remember to take things in small steps by spreading large tasks over several days and tackling them first. Finally, prioritize. If you cannot get everything done, get the most important things done. The biggest obstacle to progress is fear. Procrastination often comes from being intimidated by the work ahead.

Special Circumstances: Religious Schools
When leading a chapter at a religious school, do not create unnecessary tension with administration. A chapter that violates restrictions (e.g. discussing abortion or condom distribution) is going to lose the support of the administration. Some religious schools will only let students attend a convention if they attend religious services at the appropriate times or eat certain foods, which can be arranged by speaking with the JSA office ahead of time.

The Chapter Program
Common Chapter Deficiencies
- Lack of Interesting things for your chapter to do
- Lack of enough interested members to accomplish anything
- Lack of knowledge of JSA activities on the regional and state levels
- Lack of knowledge of JSA's goals, mission, philosophy, history, and government
- Lack of public speaking ability among chapter members
- Lack of publicity
- Lack of money or successful fund-raisers
- Lack of long range planning
- Lack of communication with state and regional JSA governments
- Lack or records
- Lack of cooperation among administrators, Teacher Advisors, and parents
Your First Chapter Officers’ Meeting

At the earliest possible time, have a meeting with your chapter officers and Teacher Advisor. At this meeting, you should discuss your chapter and its future along with your plans for the year. Consider the following things:

- **Goals:** The Junior State of America was founded with very specific goals in mind -- to make high school students aware of and involved in the American political process. We strive to achieve this goal by conducting political education/awareness activities and by having students run their own government. Political education activities give students an awareness of local, state, national, and international political issues. The student-run nature of the Junior State lets student leaders develop an appreciation of the values and principles of a democracy.

- **Administration:** You should decide what your administrative duties will include for the year and how you intend to get them done. You and your officers should decide at the beginning of the year who will be responsible for which duties, such as communication, chapter activities, publicity, and fundraising. Will you need to appoint cabinet members to help out? Try to make sure that there are jobs for underclassmen.

- **Outreach and Retention:** Understand where your members are coming from and how to keep them. Reaching out, you must understand why people usually join organizations:
  - Security and social acceptance
  - Personal growth and development
  - Accomplishment and achievement
  - Understanding of a subject
  - Recognition by peers
  - Sense of worth and companionship
  - Meet people and make friends

For current members, consider:

- Age
- Number of chapter members
- Their gender
- General social habits
- Political beliefs
- Preferences in JSA activities
- How well the members know each other

Have a meeting with your chapter officers and other key chapter members to get ideas for how to run chapter activities that create and help members by appealing to them and holding their interest. The more people involved in the planning, the better ideas and support you will have.
## Sample Chapter Calendar

Activities Calendar - Riverdale High School Junior State of America Chapter  
*First Semester*

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Activity Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>“What is JSA” Meeting, plus pizza party after school.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 - Monday</td>
<td>Business Meeting</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 - Thursday</td>
<td>Debate on Affirmative Action</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Business Meeting</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Adult Speakers from the Democratic and Republican Parties</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Fund Raiser -- Bake Sale</td>
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<td>6 - Thursday</td>
<td>Debate Workshop &amp; Arrange car pools for Regional Conference</td>
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<tr>
<td>6 - Saturday</td>
<td>REGIONAL CONFERENCE</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Business Meeting</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Thought Talk on Aid to Russia</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Pot Luck Dinner -- Pre Fall State Meeting w/ Parents</td>
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<td>10 - Sat &amp; Sun</td>
<td>FALL STATE CONV ETION</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Business Meeting</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Question and Answer Session with School Board member</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Business Meeting</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Holiday Party</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>Vacation</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>Softball game with rival chapter</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>Business Meeting</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>Mock City Council Meeting</td>
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<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Business Meeting: Planning session for next semester</td>
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<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>End of Semester Party</td>
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Varying chapter activities is vital to chapter health and member retention. Contact your state Chapter Internal Affairs department, your program director, and/or other student leaders for inventive ideas; remember that activism and speaking up on local or school affairs are creative ways to become involved.
The Chapter and Your School

Your Base of Operations

The school is the base from which chapters operate. Consider the chapter’s reputation with the student body and administration. How do students view JSA on your campus? All students at your school should feel welcome to your JSA chapter. Be aware of your chapter’s reputation so you can keep it a positive one.

Teachers

History teachers, government/civic teachers, the journalism advisor, and other social studies teachers can spread the word about your chapter’s activities. Some teachers offer extra credit to participants in JSA’s educational activities. If you need more teachers to overnight at conventions, you will need to be on good terms. Holding a debate with two popular teachers as speakers draws students.

School Administration

Meet with your principal or other administrators who are in charge of clubs on campus and show them how your chapter can benefit students. Highlight chapter activities on campus, not overnight conventions, conventions present issues for the administrators. At the end of the year or after conventions, present successes to the PTO (who won best speaker gavels or elections at conventions, what volunteer events were held, which debates had good turnout, etc.) which may give your chapter funding in the future.
- JSA is a student-run, non-partisan, non-profit political awareness club.

- Students run the chapter meetings, decide on debate topics, organize every aspect of the chapter.

- JSA gives students an opportunity to voice their opinions on local, state, national, and world issues. The free exchange of ideas and views is a highlight of all JSA activities.

- JSA is a club with a purpose. JSA strives “To Make Democracy Work” by preparing high school students to be active, involved citizens.

- JSA is more than just a debate club. JSA encourages political awareness and involvement through its debates and other activities.

- JSA gives students valuable “citizenship training” by letting students run their own government. JSA’s National, State, Regional, and Chapter governments reinforce democratic principles and prepares students to be informed, active citizens.

- JSA chapters conduct a wide range of political awareness activities: informal discussions, structured debates, educational simulations, challenging mock trials, informative political guest speakers, and voter registration drives are only a few of the activities chapters hold.

- JSA chapters are the centers of political awareness on high school campuses across the country. Being part of JSA is a chance to meet and make friends with other bright involved students who are aware of what is happening in the world around them.

- JSA holds Saturday conferences and overnight conventions that allow students from many different high schools a chance to debate and discuss important issues. JSA events feature exciting activities, interesting political keynote speakers, and great social activities.

- JSA provides a valuable opportunity for students to develop or sharpen public speaking skills. Public speaking is a major emphasis of JSA. Our debates and discussions help students develop the ability to verbally express their thoughts and opinions in a clear and persuasive manner.

- JSA gives students a chance to develop important leadership skills. As a student-run organization, JSA helps its leaders develop leadership skills such as organizing meetings, delegating responsibility, and motivating their peers.

- JSA helps develop critical thinking skills. JSA members challenge each other’s assumptions about the issues that affect their lives. This forces students to reevaluate their positions and develop more sophisticated arguments to support their beliefs or to change their position altogether.

- JSA encourages “PEER TO PEER” education. Students are in charge of their own educational activities. Students learn best when they learn from each other.

- A strong, active JSA Chapter is an asset for any high school campus. JSA is a valuable supplement to a high school’s social studies curriculum. Our American democracy depends on an education system that prepares young people to take on the responsibilities of citizenship.