



**ASA Chapter Manual:
Revised April 22, 2010**

I. Getting started

A. Welcome letter from Steph Sherer

Dear Friend,

Thank you for taking time to read the ASA Chapter Manual. On behalf of our national organization, I want to welcome you to the ASA family. ASA gets its strength from thousands of members across the country, and it's because of you that we are able to achieve positive victories for safe access to medical cannabis. Thanks to our national network of chapters, ASA has the ability to engage policymakers at the local, state, and national level.

Inside this Chapter Manual, you will find important information on how to start an ASA chapter in your community. There are also additional materials on our website for individuals interested in applying to become an ASA Ambassador, as well as ways for other medical cannabis organizations to be ASA Affiliates.

Launching an ASA chapter involves significant work and significant rewards. Inside this manual, you will find guidelines, rules, and advice for how to get started. Our ASA staff is happy to provide you with resources and support. We want to help you succeed in meeting your community's needs. We also will need your help in making sure that the national fight for safe access to medical cannabis is successful.

Thanks again for taking the time to read this ASA Chapter Manual. Please contact us with any questions you may have. The easiest way is to e-mail action@AmericansforSafeAccess.org.

Sincerely,

Steph Sherer

B. Introduction to ASA

Americans for Safe Access (ASA) works to promote safe and legal access to cannabis for therapeutic uses and research. We are the largest national member-based organization of patients, medical professionals, scientists and concerned citizens.

ASA works with state, local and national legislators to overcome barriers and create policies that improve access to cannabis for patients and researchers. We have more than 50,000 active members, with chapters and affiliates across the U.S. ASA provides legal training and medical information to patients, attorneys, health and medical professionals, and policymakers throughout the U.S. We also organize media support for court cases, rapid response efforts for law enforcement raids, and capacity-building for advocates.

Medical cannabis patient and current Executive Director Steph Sherer founded ASA in 2002 in response to federal raids on patients in California. Ever since then, ASA has been instrumental in shaping the political and legal landscape of medical cannabis. Our successful lobbying, media, and legal campaigns have led to positive court precedents, compassionate legislative and administrative policies, and created a political space for safe and legal access.

ASA protects the rights of cannabis patients. We are working to change federal policy to meet the immediate needs of patients, as well as create long-term strategies for safe access and programs that encourage research.

C. ASA's Core Beliefs & Values:

While many different concerns bring people to the issue of medical cannabis, the following are the beliefs and values that guide our work at ASA.

- Cannabis has significant medical application and is an important medication for many patients
- Current federal law on medical cannabis is not grounded in science, and this prevents patients from accessing the medicine they need.
- Government should promote policies that facilitate safe access to medical cannabis and promote scientific research.

ASA's campaigns and programs all work to meet the following goals:

- End federal raids and prosecutions of medical cannabis patients and their providers.
- Remove federal barriers for medical and scientific cannabis research.

- Create a comprehensive access plan for seriously ill patients throughout the United States.

ASA's Campaign strategies and tactics:

- Deepen public understanding of cannabis therapeutics through public education, PR and outreach campaigns.
- Build support on Capitol Hill and in various states to support safe and legal access to cannabis for therapeutic uses and research.
- Mobilize an emergency response network of activists nationwide to respond to federal law enforcement raids on cannabis patients and providers through public protest and non-violent direct action.
- Build broad coalitions with other patient support organizations, medical associations, and public health institutions to support safe access to cannabis for therapeutic use and to appropriately frame cannabis as a public health issue.
- Create, protect, and expand safe access to medical cannabis in states.

II. ASA's Core Policies

A. Focus on Medical Cannabis

ASA is solely focused on expanding safe access to medical cannabis. This means that ASA does not have a position for or against legalization of cannabis for non-medical purposes, or on related issues, such as incarceration or sentencing standards for recreational drug use.

This also means that ASA chapters are not permitted to campaign for or against drug legalization measures or proposals. ASA and its chapters do not have a stand on cannabis legalization or laws related to other controlled substances.

B. Nonpartisan

ASA and its chapters cannot endorse candidates for elected office. This would be a violation of the organization's nonpartisan and nonprofit status. ASA and its chapters are also not allowed to use funds to make contributions to candidates' political campaigns.

However, it is acceptable – and highly encouraged -- to seek candidates' positions on medical cannabis issues. It is also highly encouraged to invite political candidates to chapter meetings or even host a meet-and-greet with candidates so they can get to know patients and ASA members in their community.

In addition, it is perfectly legal for ASA chapters to campaign for or against ballot initiatives, referenda, state constitutional amendments, bond measures, or similar measures. Any position that an ASA chapter takes should be in line with the ASA organization's focus on expanding safe access to medical cannabis. ASA chapters cannot take stands for or against efforts to legalize cannabis outside of a medical scope.

III. Why an ASA chapter?

A. What does a great chapter look like?

Launching an ASA chapter is a great way to formally bring together like-minded activists in your community to work together towards ensuring safe access to medical cannabis. ASA chapters are part of a national network of ASA activists and staff who work together on a regular basis to achieve shared goals.

A great ASA chapter brings together vibrant activists in an environment of mutual respect, shared responsibility, and constructive political activism and create a space for new advocates to plug in to the movement. The ideal ASA chapter is networked into the larger community and is a constructive voice for patients and providers of medical cannabis.

The best ASA chapters combine the art of conversation with skilled activism. They are considered by elected officials to be a principled voice and smart resource for community leaders who are interested in addressing the question of medical cannabis.

B. ASA chapters are NOT:

- One person.
- Groups that dispense medication.
- Groups that are linked to an individual medical cannabis provider.
- Commercial entities or groups that make commercial endorsements or promotions.

C. ASA resources and support

ASA chapters can depend on ASA for support, guidance, and encouragement. We want to provide you with the materials and tactical guidance to help you succeed. We also want to get you networked into our national community of chapter leaders ASA activists.

Specifically, here are some of the ways ASA can help as you build your chapter:

1. Online materials and support for newly forming chapters.
2. Nationwide chapter leader conference calls.
3. E-mail updates on local, state, and national ASA issues.
4. Phone-based trainings on lobbying, media, action planning, civil disobedience, and strategy.
5. Materials available online:
 - a. Start-up toolkits including this organizing handbook, a media manual, citizen lobbying handbook, medical cannabis fact sheets, and sampling of ASA literature.
6. Space on the ASA national website to post local contact information.
7. Occasional opportunities to publicize your chapter's efforts via e-mail to ASA's large network of online activists.

D. Are there other ways to get involved, besides starting an ASA chapter?

1. Apply to be an ASA Ambassador

If you aren't quite ready to launch a chapter with other medical cannabis activists, applying to become an ASA Ambassador might be a great way to get started. ASA Ambassadors are key voices on medical cannabis issues across the country. Upon being accepted into the program, ASA Ambassadors receive online trainings, political updates, and the opportunity to regularly interact with other ASA Ambassadors across the country.

To learn more, visit:

<http://www.AmericansforSafeAccess.org/ambassador>

2. Apply to start an ASA Action Group

ASA Action Groups are informal clusters of activists who work together to stand up for safe access to medical cannabis. ASA Action Groups can work on medical cannabis issues at that local, state, and national level. ASA Action Groups are more informal than ASA Chapters, and they don't have the same requirements for elections, etc. You can start an ASA Action Group if there isn't already an ASA Chapter in your community, and there can be more than one ASA Action Group in a city or county.

To learn more, visit:

<http://www.AmericansforSafeAccess.org/actiongroups>

3. ASA Affiliates

If you are already part of another like-minded group (SSDP, NORML, ACT-UP, etc.), you are welcome to work on ASA campaigns and serve as an ASA affiliate for your area. We will call on you to help with national actions and lobbying, and you can still do the other work your group does at regular meetings.

To find out more, e-mail action@AmericansforSafeAccess.org.

IV. Building a Chapter

What does a good chapter leader look like?

A good chapter leader sets the tone for respectful communication, fiscal integrity, and transparency in decisions and plans. Chapter members have a clear sense of how chapter funds are spent, how chapter decisions are made, and why they are all valued members of a team.

In addition, a good chapter leader keeps up with ASA alerts/actions, participates in national chapter conference calls, regularly submits new chapter sign-ups and memberships to ASA, and maintains written records of chapter income, expenses, and assets.

Chapter requirements -- what do I need to start?

Summary:

- 10 ASA members who have made an annual membership contribution to the national ASA organization.
 - Standard contributions are \$35 per person, and there is a sliding scale for low-income contributors. The minimum individual contribution is \$10.
 - To confirm that you have met this requirement, email action@safeaccessnow.org.
- Chapter Coordinating Committee: At least five members, including the chapter chair and any vice-chairs.
- A chapter chair, elected by the full chapter.
- If needed, one or more chapter vice chairs, depending on the chapter's needs. Vice chairs are also elected by the full chapter and are part of the chapter coordinating committee.
- A roster of meeting attendees. To participate in annual chapter elections, one must be a "chapter member" and attend at two chapter meetings a year. The chapter election meeting is not included in this "two meetings" attendance requirement.
- Meetings that are at least monthly, publicized, and open to the public.

- A liaison between ASA and your chapter.

10 ASA Members:

To start an ASA chapter, you need to bring together **10 ASA members** who have made a financial contribution to ASA. ASA wants to ensure that our chapters adequately represent groups of ASA members in the communities where they are launched.

Chapter Coordinating Committee:

The **Chapter Coordinating Committee** is the core leadership group of your chapter. These are the folks who communicate between chapter meetings and help streamline the process of running a good ASA chapter. Not every chapter member may want to deal with every detail of running an effective ASA chapter. This is the group of people that makes sure that chapter meetings are planned and that nitty-gritty decisions get made.

The Chapter Coordinating Committee is elected by the full chapter and must be at least five people. These five people would include the Chair and any Vice chair positions. Some of our best ASA chapters organize their Coordinating Committee with no single leader and make all decisions by consensus. If there is no single leader, one of the Coordinating Committee members should act as the ASA liaison.

Some chapters are on the smaller side of things -- as few as 10 members total. If you have a small chapter, the Coordinating Committee can simply be the entire chapter.

Why is a Chapter Coordinating Committee useful? As your ASA chapter grows, you could eventually find yourself with as many as 25, 50, or more people attending your monthly meetings. It is important to have a core group that can communicate with each other and help keep the larger chapter running smoothly. Responsibilities may include coordinating local volunteer positions, creating the agenda, email alerts, announcements, reminders, etc.

Chapter Chair

The full chapter should also elect a Chapter Chair who is the official coordinator of the chapter. Please note that the Chair should not make decisions without the approval of the Chapter Coordinating Committee. The Chair position should be viewed as the spokesperson for the group for the chapter, not a "boss."

Vice Chairs

The full chapter can also elect any Vice Chairs that the group agrees are necessary. Vice Chairs could include people focused on fundraising, chapter finances, community outreach, or even specific campaigns. The Chapter Chair and any Vice Chairs are part of the coordinating committee.

An Alternative: Consensus-Based / No leader

Some of our best ASA chapters organize their Coordinating Committee with no single leader and make all decisions by consensus. We highly recommend you implement this structure. One of the Coordinating Committee members should act as the ASA liaison when using this leadership model.

Chapter Members

One must be a Chapter Member to vote in annual chapter elections. To be a voting Chapter Member, one must attend at least two Chapter meetings in the previous year, not including the annual chapter elections. The Chapter Coordinating Committee should track Chapter membership with a monthly sign-up sheet for all meeting attendees.

Elections

Within a year of a chapter's launch, the Chapter Coordinating Committee should hold elections that the whole ASA Chapter membership participates in. ASA Chapter elections should be held for the Chair, any Vice chair positions, and remaining Chapter Coordinating Committee seats, or for the members of the Coordinating Committee if following the No Leader Consensus model

V. Chapter Decision-Making

A. Consensus:

Both the Chapter Coordinating Committee and the full chapter should strive to make decisions through a process of consensus. Sometimes, relying on a majority vote is inevitable. However, the healthiest and strongest chapters arrive at their decisions through a process that is inclusive of the collective wisdom of the membership.

B. Quorum:

For a Chapter Coordinating Committee to make decisions, there must be a quorum present. A quorum is defined as a majority. That means that if your Chapter Coordinating Committee has five members, at least three must be present to make any decisions.

C. Conflict resolution:

As a rule of thumb, conflicts are best resolved in person. E-mail disputes rarely resolve peacefully, primarily because it is easy to read whatever emotion one wants into a text-based message. Only by sitting in front of somebody is it truly possible to emotionally understand where that person is coming from and how they are feeling.

D. Dealing with problematic individuals and leaders

Ideally, interpersonal conflicts with individuals who demonstrate problematic behavior patterns can be addressed through direct conversation, without involving the entire group. Sometimes, however, there are "problem" individuals whose behavior is repeatedly disruptive to the productive functioning of an ASA Chapter.

Examples of such behavior can include repeated unilateral decision-making, extreme argumentativeness, ongoing insults, or even threats.

In such cases, it may be necessary to remove a chapter member from the chapter entirely. Doing so requires a vote by two thirds of the entire Chapter Coordinating Committee. Please note that the two thirds vote must include all members of the Chapter Coordinating Committee. This means that a five person Chapter Coordinating Committee would need at least four people to vote to expel a chapter member.

When removing someone from the chapter, the Chapter Coordinating Committee should be clear with the individual as to what standards of behavior were violated. The Chapter Coordinating Committee should also provide a written notice articulating the behaviors in question and why those behaviors were unworkable..

Such a vote must not be taken over e-mail. The vote must also be documented and provided to the national ASA staff.:

action@AmericansforSafeAccess.org.

E. ASA Authority and Chapter disputes

ASA reserves the right to disband or otherwise intervene in ASA Chapter affairs. ASA staff prefer not to engage in such efforts, and our goal is to support ASA chapters as best we can.

ASA staff intervention or disbanding of chapters may occur in serious situations that include a breakdown of chapter leadership, irresolvable chapter disputes, or chapter actions that violate the standards and policies outlined in this manual.

ASA generally commits to giving a chapter advance warning before intervening or disbanding the chapter. Advanced warning can include specific steps the chapter can take to address a specific problem and a timeline to do so. In extreme cases, ASA may make a unilateral decision without providing advance warning.

If an ASA chapter or individual disagrees with an ASA decision or warning, the chapter or chapter leaders may request a review by the ASA Associate Director or Executive Director. Such a review may be requested by phone or email. The decision of the Executive Director is final in these cases.

VI. Ongoing Chapter Requirements

A. Community level:

Community Responsiveness

ASA Chapters have a primary goal of supporting medical cannabis patients and advocating for safe access to medical cannabis in the communities where they exist. This means that being responsive to the community is important.

At a minimum, ASA Chapters should maintain publicly available contact information on the ASA webpage and in any other appropriate community venues.

Public Meetings

ASA Chapters are required to hold meetings that are at least monthly. Meetings should be publicly announced at least two weeks in advance. Chapter meetings must also be held in a publicly accessible location that is accessible to those with disabilities.

ASA Chapter meetings should if possible not be held at a dispensary or other commercial medical cannabis location. This is to prevent ASA Chapters from

being seen as explicitly or implicitly endorsing a specific medical cannabis related business entity. Also, we want to ensure that supporters and family members are welcome at these public meetings, not just patients & caregivers. If it is absolutely necessary to hold a chapter meeting at a dispensary location, the meetings should rotate between dispensaries so that it is clear that the chapters supports all of the local facilities.

Elections

Every ASA Chapter must hold annual elections that are publicly announced at least one month in advance. ASA staff must also be included in this notification. The results should also be announced at the elections, and the results should be publicly announced within a week of the elections.

B. With National ASA:

ASA Chapter participation in monthly ASA conference calls:

Every ASA Chapter should have a least one person from the chapter participating in national ASA monthly conference calls for chapters and affiliates.

National ASA campaigns:

All ASA Chapters must participate in national ASA campaigns and actions.

Check-ins:

ASA Chapters should be available for consultations and check-ins with national ASA staff.

Yearly reporting:

All ASA chapters must complete a yearly summary of the following:

1. Goals
2. Key accomplishments and challenges for the year.
3. List of members.
4. Name and contact info for the five Coordinating Council members and officers, if designated.
5. Simple financial statement of income, expenses, and assets.
6. Goals for the coming year.

The national ASA staff will provide a report form. Reports are to be submitted by January 30th, following the close of the year.

C. Financial requirements:

Chapter bank accounts

If needed, ASA Chapters should store their funds in a bank account that has two chapter signatories.

ASA does not provide bank accounts for ASA chapters or hold ASA chapter funds. Exceptions shall be made for one-time projects of \$10,000 or more, where a donor would like to receive a tax deduction. ASA can administer such a fund for a small administrative fee.

Your chapter bank account is not a National ASA bank account. You should speak to a qualified accountant or tax advisor about the tax liabilities that may arise from opening a chapter bank account.

Fundraising

Local ASA Chapter fundraising is allowed and encouraged. When engaging in local fundraising, chapters should be clear to contributors that their contributions:

- are not going to the national ASA organization.
- do not count towards ASA membership.
- are not tax-deductible and do not receive a 501(c)(3) tax write-off.

Incorporating as a Separate Entity

ASA chapters are not allowed to incorporate as separate nonprofit entities. ASA chapters that are interested in doing so are encouraged to become ASA affiliates and incorporate as separate, non-ASA organizations without the ASA brand. Alternatively, ASA Chapters may ask another nonprofit to be their fiscal sponsor. A quick google search on “fiscal sponsorship for nonprofits” will yield important resources to guide you in this process.

VII. **How do I get started?**

A. **Check if there is already an ASA chapter in your community**

With ASA chapters all over the country, it is worth taking a look online to see if there is already an ASA chapter in your community. To do so, go to <http://www.americansforsafeaccess.org> and click on "Community." Within that section is a list of all ASA chapters, affiliates, and other regional contacts nationwide.

B. **Email action@safeaccessnow.org to apply to start an ASA chapter.**

Send us details about your region, goals, and the people who are interested in participating.

C. **Wait for our feedback**

ASA approves requests to start new chapters based on a careful evaluation of the goals, accomplishments, skills, and enthusiasm of those involved. We want to make sure that our new chapters have the best guarantee of success, which means that we want to encourage committed local activists with a track record of collaborative work to apply.

We promise to give your application full consideration, but we can't promise that every single application to start a chapter is automatically approved.

If you want to follow up on your application, please send an e-mail to action@AmericansforSafeAccess.org.

VIII. **Tips for Successful Chapter Meetings**

A. **Pick a facilitator**

The person who runs the meeting doesn't necessarily have to be the chapter chair or another leadership position. The right meeting facilitator is someone who combines good people skills, a patient and friendly demeanor, and a sense of timing and focus on the agenda.

B. **Pick a note taker**

Everyone benefits when there is a clear set of notes documenting what people agreed to during the meeting.

C. Draft an agenda (ahead of time!)

Before the meeting, plan a solid draft agenda, along with rough times for each item. It is important to do this before the meeting starts, so that you don't spend an inordinate amount of time in the meeting itself deciding what you're going to be meeting about.

Even the best meeting planners can't possibly anticipate everyone's interests, so it is important that you are also open to taking feedback at the beginning of the meeting on ways that the draft agenda should be changed.

D. Agree on ground rules

Read meeting ground rules and get a consensus from the group that they will be respected. The group may decide to add rules as well. It will be up to the facilitator to gently remind people of the ground rules if they are broken to keep the meeting running smoothly.

E. Do introductions

It is a good idea to set perimeters around introductions. These can include saying your name, where you are from, and the agenda items you are most interested in. You may also need to remind people that there will be time for announcements at the end of the meeting so that they know there will be another time in the meeting to be heard.

F. Start with agenda feedback

Remember that agenda you drafted? Now's the chance to make sure that everyone in the meeting is on the same page.

G. Ending

End with a time for the next meeting and open announcements for items that were not included in the agenda

IX. Resources

For additional materials that can help you launch or build an ASA Chapter, please go to <http://www.AmericansforSafeAccess.org/chapters>