



Students For Liberty

Tabling

Tabling is one of the most important activities for any student organization. The first impression that students get of your organization often comes from seeing you at the table. Tabling is useful for several reasons. It can help with:

- Recruiting new members
- Promoting an upcoming event
- Distributing information and resources during an event
- Attracting new members
- Spreading awareness of your group, or of a particular message.

The beauty of tabling is in the give and take. It offers the opportunity to put your club in the spotlight as you interact with interested students.

When to Table

There's never really a wrong time to table, excepting times when students aren't out and about. That said, there are times when tabling is especially important:

- At the beginning of each semester: Always remember that there are a great deal of activities for students to get involved in, so if you don't attract new students early you may not get them at all. You need to table early each semester to reach students before they have taken on too many other extra-curricular commitments
- Leading up to an event: This is one of the most important ways you can promote an event you are holding. In the weeks leading up to the big day, make sure to table often and include materials related to your event. Have flyers with information on the event to hand out to students (a good way to cut costs is by creating half- or quarter-page flyers and cutting them up).
- During school-wide tabling fairs: The importance of tabling at school-sponsored fairs should be clear. Students go with the express purpose of finding activities and organizations to get involved in, so make sure you are there. It's especially important at tabling fairs to make sure your group stands out from the pack, so make sure to have exciting swag to give away and good eye-catchers (more on that below)
- When there is a buzz on campus: Maybe there was a controversial op-ed in the student paper, or a recent announcement that tuition will be raised. Find a way to connect whatever it is that students are already talking about with a libertarian message in order to really interest potential table visitors.

Preparation and Set-Up

The set-up should begin long before the actual tabling so you can gather the appropriate volunteers and supplies. The most important component of tabling is volunteers to man the table. It's best to have two to three volunteers working the table at any one time, though a single volunteer can suffice for most purposes. There will always be unexpected problems that prevent people from showing up to table, so be on the safe-side and try to have three students signed up



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to table at all times. Make sure to confirm the attendance of each volunteer on the day of tabling – don't assume that students will remember having signed up to table.

After you have the people committed, you need to organize your supplies. The following is a basic, but by no means comprehensive, list of good materials to have at your table:

- Sign-up sheets. Any time you table, you should be trying to recruit new members. The best way to do this is to collect their name, contact information, and graduation year on a sign-up sheet, which can be written on paper or typed into a word processor/spreadsheets.
- A banner with your organization's name and logo.
- An SFL Tabling Kit [visit www.studentsforliberty.org for a comprehensive list of our resources]
- Books, flyers, and/or articles to populate the table and spread your message.
- Some sort of "eye-catcher." This can be a person in costume, an Operation Politically Homeless¹ display, or anything that will make students curious enough to approach the table.
- A camera/smartphone/flipcam to document your efforts and the students you attracted to your table.
- Table-cloth to make your display look more appealing

Make sure whoever is bringing the supplies to the table has them all packed the night before, and is able to bring them with ample time to set up.

Student Interactions

During your time at the table you will be pulled into a variety of conversations about your group, what they stand for, and how they compare to other groups on campus. You should always remain calm and professional. Remember that you are there to sell the group, and the best way to do that is to find out about the students who visit your table. Each student is different, just as each libertarian comes to support the philosophy for different reasons. Try to understand peoples' interests and the ends they are pursuing. For example, people don't typically view government-run healthcare as an end in itself. Rather, they see it as a means to get affordable, quality healthcare for as many people as possible. If someone like this comes to your table, the most effective strategy is not simply to attack government-run healthcare but to explain why the market can provide higher quality care to more people. Show them that our means are the best ways to achieve their ends.

You will inevitably be put on the spot by students with tough questions. It is ok to admit when you're not sure how to answer a question. You can get the students' contact info and follow up with them after you've done some research or reflection on the subject, or send them good reading material on the issue. You do not want to get nervous, defensive or aggressive – acting that way is counterproductive.

You will likely face aggressive and skeptical people while tabling. Some will be openly hostile and unwilling to listen to you. That is not necessarily a bad thing: you can use them to convince your audience. Move the conversation to the side of the table so the other volunteers

¹ Operation Political Homeless kits are a fantastic resource for outreach. The kits utilize the "Nolan chart," a political map that separates people into 5 categories (Liberal, Conservative, Authoritarian, Libertarian, and Centrist) based on their responses to a ten-question quiz. Contact the Advocates for Self Government (www.theadvocates.org) to get your free kit.



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can carry on conducting their usual tabling business. During the discussion, let the other person come off as aggressive while you remain calm and collected. Be seen by the people watching and listening as the rational one who is willing to listen and discuss the issues honestly.²

Finally, be friendly and proactive. Do not just sit behind the table and wait for people to come to you. Stand in front of it and greet students as they walk by. Be friendly, smile, and shake their hands as they approach. Your body language will go a long way to setting the stage for a good conversation and getting them interested in your group. Remember that you are selling the ideas of liberty and your organization, so you have to present a positive and welcoming face.

Follow-Up

The work doesn't end when the table is bare and the volunteers leave. It is imperative that you get back to anyone who signed up with your organization within 48 hours, even if it is just a quick e-mail thanking them for their interest and informing them of an upcoming meeting. Include your contact information and an invitation to ask any questions they may have about your group. Use this follow-up opportunity to identify future leaders or passionate people and send them a personalized e-mail explaining what your group has to offer and the exciting events that will be coming in the future at your school and in your region.

Finally, conduct an overview of your supplies to find out what you need more of before your next tabling opportunity.

² You may find it helpful to read *The Secrets of Libertarian Persuasion* by Michael Cloud, available on amazon.com