

## Forming A Professional State Student Assistance Association

The National Association of Student Assistance Professionals offers this guidance for those who would like to increase their effectiveness by joining with others in their states who are focused on the same goals: helping students and enhancing their own professional practice.

### *Phase One — Start Up (0-12 months)*

Most grass roots organizations begin with a core group of interested people. If your state does not have a student assistance association, don't wait – start it yourself. Call others who share your vision and ask them to join you.

Selection of key people is critical in the formation of your interest group. Representatives usually include school SAP professionals, drug and alcohol or mental health specialists, SAP trainers, state government representatives and any other groups that focus on youth behavioral health. Be clear that this is a volunteer organization, and that each person's major contribution will be time. Most employers will see this as a good public/community relations project, so advise those who are not school based to enlist their company's support for working on the project on company/agency time.

Specific steps need to be completed during this phase:

**Step 1 — Create an ad-hoc committee**, which may later become the official board of directors.

**Step 2 — Select a leader**, who may later become the charter president.

**Step 3 — Develop a mission statement** that clearly defines the purpose of your association.

**Step 4 — Create a name.** Discuss things like your mission and philosophy, what letters will make a memorable and pronounceable acronym, and what people like.

**Step 5 — Write your bylaws.** These will specify how your organization is structured and governed. NASAP has copies of other state association bylaws. Please call for copies; don't reinvent the wheel.

**Step 6 — Incorporate** as a non-profit organization, and file for tax-exempt status. This is not as difficult as it sounds, but there are different forms for the state and federal levels, and there is chronological order and a time limit for filing. Consider seeking legal advice. Many attorneys will file these papers as a free service.

**Step 7 — Create a membership brochure.** This is one of the most important steps because it will communicate to future members the “who,” “what” and “how much” information they will want. It also is the vehicle that will garner the association's initial revenue — through membership dues. Be sure to include your mission statement and clearly state the services offered by the association. And remember to keep it simple and cost-effective: with today's technology, brochures can be created “in-house.”

**Step 8 — Develop a marketing strategy.** To do this requires some vision. Who would be most interested in joining this kind of group? Usually it will be people who have had basic student assistance program training. Call your state department of education and ask for the contact list of people for each district that receives grants through the Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Act. Most states will allow schools and agencies to pay membership dues out of this grant. Call training providers in your state and ask if they would distribute your brochures at their trainings. Then flood your market with

information about your organization and make sure you are prepared to deliver on anything you promise, such as 1) a conference of high quality, 2) newsletters in a timely fashion, 3) a membership directory that is accurate, 4) discounts to other SAP events, 5) regional meetings.

Take your time laying the ground work in Phase One. Careful planning in the first phase will lead to success in the second phase.

### ***Phase Two — Going Public (12 — 18 months)***

Most state associations have chosen a statewide conference as their launching point. This can be done on your own. However, a better idea may be to coordinate your efforts with pre-existing conferences that already are drawing your future membership (state teacher conferences, alcohol and drug counselors conferences, etc.)

Then follow these steps:

**Step 1 – Create an agenda for your first public membership meeting.** Tell your audience that your interest group has been working hard to lay the groundwork for the state association, and you are now presenting this new organization to the public. Ask for volunteers to become the charter members and ask them to be the first to write out a check to your new organization.

**Step 2 – Have a concrete piece of business that the people in attendance can vote on.** Ask attendees to provide their support through a voice vote to have the initial interest group become the official board of directors.

**Step 3 – Encourage participation in the new organization.** Circulate committee sign-up sheets that have specific meetings. A partial list of committees could be:

1. Conference
2. Newsletters
3. Directory
4. Public relations
5. Nominations
6. Membership

**Step 4 – End your first public meeting with a date to reconvene.** Usually, annual membership meetings take place at an organization's annual conference. This is when nominations for new board members are announced and voted on. If you do not feel that you will be ready to host your own annual conference, then have your next membership meeting at an existing conference that many of your members will already attend.

### ***Phase Three — Development and Growth (after 18 months)***

After your initial meeting it is a good idea to reconvene as a board to determine goals for the next year and to create a yearly schedule of meetings.

Realize that solidifying the association will require the continued efforts of many dedicated people. For example, when bylaws established early on don't work out as intended, be ready to change them. Bylaws are a tool to assist your association in staying focused on its mission. They should never be seen as restrictive and prohibitive.

It is imperative for the governing board to keep the interest of the membership foremost in mind. The association exists because of its membership. Therefore, the

governing board and its policies and practices must serve the membership. Establish ways for each member to have input into the development of the association.

There will always be a need for organizations such as the National Association of Student Assistance Professionals and affiliated state chapters. By combining our strength and working in unison on both state and national levels, we can provide more effective early identification and intervention for students and quality education and training of student assistance professionals.