

Guide to Starting a National History Club Chapter

For Students, Teachers, and History Buffs everywhere!

Do you want to engage in history beyond the textbook and outside the classroom? Starting a chapter of the National History Club (NHC) is an excellent way to further involve students, faculty, and community members in the excitement of history.

Chances are you already value the kinds of hands-on-history experiences a history club can create. If well organized and supported by its members, a history club will have a lasting impact on everyone involved--students, teachers, your school, and even your community! Since 2002 middle and high schools in 44 states have founded chapters, and there are now over 16,000 students involved.

Starting a history club is fun and exciting, but it is also a challenge. This guide will tell you what you need to know to get a NHC Chapter off the ground successfully at your school.

THE FIRST STEP: FINDING AN ADVISOR OR CO-ADVISOR

All NHC chapters are required to have at least one faculty advisor. So, whether you are a student leader, an enthusiastic teacher, or a history buff who is looking to get involved at a local school, your first challenge is recruiting a faculty advisor. If you are a teacher and plan to become the faculty advisor, we encourage you to consider recruiting a co-advisor for extra support. Co-Advisors can be teachers, parents, or anyone who wants to get involved.

Here are a few things to think about when looking for a faculty advisor or a co-advisor:

- ✓ **Enthusiasm** – You know those teachers who dazzle students in the classroom with their energy, innovation, and excitement? They are perfect candidates.

ORGANIZING COUNTS!

“Being part of a National Organization legitimizes the club for parents, the school administration, and students. The newsletter both informs and provides members with a sense of being a part of a larger organization with common interests, allows them to see what other clubs are doing, and allows members to contemplate more historically based research. It allows students the opportunity to discuss and participate in intellectual discussions and community events. It provides an avenue for students to employ learning that has taken place in the classroom by participating in historical debates and discussions. Students also gain insight into problems facing modern historians as they employ historical thinking on their own. Finally, students find that being a member of this organization is an asset for their college applications.”

– Terrae Fogarty, Ph.D. (NHC Advisor) Collins Hill High School, GA



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TIP! Try contacting the Chairperson of the History or Social Studies Department to jump start your search for a faculty advisor. The Chairperson can probably recommend teachers who would be great history club advisors, and the department might want to help out!

✓ **Interest in History** – If a teacher doesn't have a passion for learning about history it's not a good fit. If your first candidate doesn't work out, be persistent and remember it's not just the history and social studies teachers who love history—try asking math and science teachers too!

✓ **Time** – The most successful history club chapters meet at least every other week—that's a big time commitment. If your prospective advisor is already coaching soccer, chairing the math department, and tutoring students after school, you may want to consider other alternatives. On the other hand, sometimes the busiest people are the ones who have the capacity to get lots done... even for your club.

✓ **Skills** – Running a history club takes skills: organizational, motivational, and managerial. You need someone who can teach and encourage members to organize and lead!

THE FIRST MEETING

Once you have an advisor, you can focus on planning for the first club meeting. Reserve a room one day after school (Your faculty advisor's room is a great spot!) and promote, promote, *promote!* The first meeting is a great chance to recruit potential club members, so don't be shy! Plaster the hallways with brilliant, eye-catching flyers, put an ad in the school newspaper, and talk to history and social studies teachers about encouraging their students to attend. And remember to get all your friends to come!

Here are a few things you can do to make the first meeting a success:

✓ **Plan a Fun Activity for the first meeting.** It is a lot easier to get people to come, and to get excited about forming a club, if you plan a fun, history-related activity for the first meeting as an example of what the club will do.

✓ **Get Organized:** Work with your faculty advisor, co-advisor, and/or students who are already interested in joining the club to create an agenda for the meeting. Remember being organized doesn't mean the meeting has to be formal and dull. (To see an example of a First Meeting Agenda, refer to the Appendix.)

✓ **Encourage everyone to participate:** The more everyone participates in an open discussion at the first meeting, the more participation you will see in future club activities. Make it clear that starting the club is a group effort!

✓ **Take Action:** Before the meeting adjourns, assign specific tasks and responsibilities to new members such as arranging the next meeting or doing research on a new activity.

PROMOTE, PROMOTE, PROMOTE!

Creative students from Wayne Valley High School in New Jersey placed posters throughout the school declaring that their club would be "All fun and no lectures. It's history without the tests!" At St. Martin High School in Mississippi the History Club designed t-shirts with the quote "Those who do not learn history are condemned to repeat it" printed on the back!

DECISIONS, DECISIONS

There are a few big decisions that club members need to make early on. We have listed some of the open questions below, but there may be others that are unique to your school or club. You may want to consider addressing some of these questions in an open discussion at the first meeting.

▪ *What do we want to do and why?*

The NHC encourages students to explore any kind of history (ancient or modern, foreign or domestic) in any kind of way (starting book clubs, visiting historic sites, conducting oral histories, etc.). However, your club might have a special interest in Russian history or local history and it's perfectly fine if you decide to focus your activities on that special interest.

▪ *Who can join the history club?*

While some clubs decide to become history honor societies and require members to maintain a certain GPA or to submit essays to *The Concord Review*, many clubs decide to keep membership open to everyone who wants to participate. Some clubs even invite younger students from the local elementary school to join. It is entirely up to club members to decide who's in and who's out... so long of course as the rules for joining are consistent with your school's rules and policies.

▪ *What kinds of activities can we participate in, plan, or create? What kinds of activities do we want to pursue?*

Choosing and creating activities that are both educational and engaging is easier than you think. First, explore your own backyard. Find out what's going on at the local historical society, local museums, and local libraries, colleges or universities. Second, think national and global. There are lots of great programs for students who are interested in history such as National History Day, *The Concord Review*, and the Veterans History Project to name just a few. The National History Club is the gateway to all these programs. Third, think creatively. Harness the interests and passions of club members to create a unique history-related program or project of your own—the sky is the limit! (For more information on Club Activities, please refer to the Appendix.)

▪ *Who runs the show?*

It is important for all club members to make decisions, to plan and to participate in activities. But it is also important to have a few club members take on special leadership positions. Many clubs elect traditional officers (President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, Historian), and some even create committees such as Fundraising Committees or Special Events Committees. How your club organizes its leaders is up to you, but it is important to think about leadership from the beginning. (For more information on Club Leaders, please refer to the Appendix.) You also need to think how the club will recruit and select its next set of leaders when the current set moves on or graduates.

A HISTORY CLUB IS UNIQUE!

"This club is not like other clubs in that we choose the area of history we want to explore. I get to know students within the context of a subject discipline while being able to truly explore topics of interest to them—without the pressure of curriculum coverage. Students really learn a lot in the history club and they also realize they can have fun with history!"

-Kathryn Green
(Advisor), Benilde-St.
Margaret's School, MN

TIP! Don't be afraid to start small. A club with a handful of motivated members can be every bit as exciting as one with 100 or more. If your club is fun and engaging, word is bound to spread.

TIP! Refer to the supplemental material in this Guide for more information on Club Activities, Club Leaders, and Club Funding, or to see an example of a First Meeting Agenda and a History Club Constitution.

▪*Should we adopt a Constitution? What should be in the Constitution?*

A Constitution can help your club stay focused and organized when everyone gets busy. It's also a great tool to help you decide what kind of club you want to be, what your mission and goals should be, and other important details like how officers are chosen or elected. But a word to the wise: keep it simple. A page or two will do the trick. (To read a Model Constitution, please refer to the Appendix.)

•*When and where should we meet?*

The best way to retain and recruit club members is to keep a regular meeting schedule. Some clubs meet every week, some every other week and others a few select dates per month. But however often you decide to meet, consistency is key. If you choose to meet every week, make it every Tuesday or every Wednesday. If you choose to meet every other week, make it every other Friday, and so on. It is also helpful to have regular meetings in the same place as often as possible, usually in the faculty advisor's classroom. The library can also be a great space to use if it is available.

▪*Who is responsible for requesting a charter from the National History Club?*

After your first meeting is over and you have the names of students who want to join the club, don't forget to send us a charter request! The request must be typed on official school stationery and must include the following: Advisor's name and contact information (including email address) and the names of all the student members. You can mail the charter request to: Executive Director Robert Nasson, National History Club, P.O. Box 441812, Somerville, MA 02144.

NOW, READY, SET... GO!

Now it's your turn to make it happen. Be persistent. Your club might start out with just a handful of enthusiastic members, but that's all it takes to get the ball rolling. In just a few weeks, you could be a founding member of a history club chapter that has a lasting impact on your school or group .. its members, other students, and faculty, ... and even people in your community. So don't wait anymore, start looking for a faculty advisor or begin planning your first meeting today!

The National History Club builds the reading, research, communication, and other skills students need to become competent citizens and leaders by inspiring large numbers of secondary school students to implement and participate in history-related programs.

EVERYONE CAN LOVE HISTORY!

"Had I not joined this group of fellow history buffs, I would probably never have realized that not only is learning about history one of my strongest interests but that it is also one of my biggest fortés. And though, in the future, I intend to go into the field of Biology, I know I can apply the 'learning while having fun' tactics to a subject as different from history as biology is."

- Ricky DeMello of Benilde-St. Margaret's School, MN

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HISTORY CLUB ACTIVITIES

A few tips to help you plan great club activities and programs:

1. *Read the NHC Newsletter.* Every issue of the NHC Newsletter features updates on at least forty history club chapters—read them. Find out what other clubs are doing and learn from them; follow their lead if you want. We always include contact information for the advisors of every club featured in the issue so please don't hesitate to get in touch and ask questions!

2. *Talk to people:* This may be the first time you have ventured into the world of history outside the classroom, but it won't take long to find a vibrant group of history enthusiasts in your community, county, or region with lots of ideas for activities. The more you talk the more you will connect with great programs and great opportunities nearby.

3. *Stay in touch with us!* One of our goals is to help connect history club chapters with great national (even international) history-related programs and to provide resources which will help you implement your own programs. Keep an eye on our website (www.nationalhistoryclub.org) for new ideas and sign up to receive NHC News Updates via email. (Email masson@nationalhistoryclub.org to sign up today!)

To jumpstart your activity brainstorming session we have developed the chart below, which lists some types of activities NHC Chapters are doing:

CHAPTER ACTIVITY CATEGORIES	
<u>Study & Learn</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">•Read history books•Visit historic sites, cemeteries, museums, reenactments, medieval festivals, etc.•Watch historical movies•Attend conferences or lectures•Study primary source materials•Participate in National History Day	<u>Analyze & Communicate</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">•Present at school assemblies•Prepare and display history exhibits/posters•Write essays, papers, articles for newsletters and/or newspapers•Stage reenactments, plays, historical speeches, mock-trials•Hold debates and discussions on historical issues•Create documentary videos•Organize peer review sessions
<u>Inquire, Maintain, Preserve</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">•Conduct and document oral histories•Study genealogies, biographies•Install or restore historical plaques•Preserve artifacts, cemeteries•Volunteer at local historical societies•Create time capsules	<u>Organize & Plan</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">•Hold contests, bowls, and trivia bees•Plan social events and fundraisers•Design and print t-shirts•Run educational programs for younger students•Organize field trips to local historic sites and museums

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HISTORY CLUB LEADERS

There are many ways to label history club leadership positions, but the most common way is: President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, and Historian. We recommend electing or choosing club leaders at the first meeting. After the first meeting, most clubs elect or choose officers at the last meeting of the school year. This way the new leaders won't miss a beat re-organizing the club in the fall!

Below are some of the responsibilities commonly associated with each position, but don't let these limit you. Remember, it is up to your club to decide what kinds of leaders it needs.

TITLE	RESPONSIBILITIES
President	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Runs club meetings and plans meeting agendas✓ Informs club members about upcoming activities✓ Leads the effort to recruit new members✓ Schedules meetings and coordinates other events✓ Represents the club to the school and community
Vice President	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Assists the President✓ Takes a leadership role whenever and wherever necessary✓ Informs club members about upcoming activities✓ Schedules meetings and coordinates other events✓ (Note: The Vice President is usually an underclassman who can be "groomed" for the Presidency)
Secretary	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Records the minutes of scheduled meetings✓ Writes and saves notes about new ideas and future plans✓ Sends notes and notices to club members and others (school news, etc.)✓ Helps plan meeting agendas
Treasurer	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Manages club finances✓ Tracks club fees, dues, and income from fundraisers✓ Plans and leads fundraising efforts
Historian	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Keeps records of all club activities (for posterity!)✓ Reaches out to the local history community✓ Leads program and activity planning

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HISTORY CLUB FUNDING

To support its activities and programs, your club will need to raise some money. At some schools the student government gives money to support extra-curricular activities, but this is unlikely to cover expenses for the whole year.

Before you start fundraising, create a budget. Include all the programs and activities you are planning for the year and figure out how much each one costs. Admission fees and transportation costs alone might break the club bank so it's a good idea to prioritize your activities too. And don't forget your NHC dues!

Once you finish the budget and you know your club's priorities, it's time to start raising some cash. Here are a few ideas to get you started:

1. **Find a sponsor.** Local businesses are always looking for ways to get involved in the community, and many local business leaders are history buffs! All you have to do is find them. Talk to your parents and teachers – they may know someone out there who loves history. Go to the leader of the local chamber of commerce, Rotary, Lions, or other clubs and ask them who loves history. When approaching someone you don't know, it's a good idea to get an introduction from some adult you do know, if that makes you more comfortable. That's the way to start creating your own network!

However, it is not necessary to be introduced if you are up for a "cold call." Get a few club members together and visit a local restaurant, hardware store, or food market and talk to a manager about your club and its activities. Bring a copy of your NHC charter and the club budget—business leaders will be impressed with your initiative. And remember, if at first you don't succeed, try and try again!

2. **Visit a Local Historical Society.** Any local history organization will be interested to learn about your club and eager to get involved. While some historical societies can offer direct financial support, many cannot. What most historical societies *can* do is apply for grants to support club projects and offer discounts or free admission to their programs. They may also have great tips on other places or people to approach for funds.

3. **Don't break tradition.** There is a reason student clubs and sports teams have bake sales—they work. Get your hands dirty and have a pie-throwing contest at the Homecoming football game, or get them clean and organize a car wash. You can be more creative with traditional fundraising techniques by incorporating some history. For example, your club could design and sell post cards with old photos and/or paintings of your town.

4. **Charging Dues.** Many clubs charge a small annual fee to members. Alternative arrangements should be made for students who cannot pay the fee, such as letting them organize or participate in a fundraiser instead.

These are just a few ideas to help you think about funding your club. For more ideas read the NHC Newsletter and keep your eye on the NHC website.

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SAMPLE: FIRST MEETING AGENDA

- I. Welcome & Introductions
- II. Introductory Activity (optional)
- III. Open Discussion
 - a. What do we want to do and why?
 - b. Who wants to join the club?
 - c. Do we want to elect club leaders?
 - i. Elect club leaders
 - d. Should we have a Constitution?
 - e. Which activities do we want to do first?
- IV. Assignments
 - a. Assign new club members to one or more of the following:
 - i. Request an official NHC Charter
 - ii. Schedule the next meeting
 - iii. Draft a Constitution
 - iv. Record meeting minutes
 - v. Research activities
- V. Closing & Thank you

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SAMPLE: HISTORY CLUB CONSTITUTION

NOTE: The NHC Chapter at Hopewell Middle School in Texas drafted this Constitution based on a model provided by our partner organization the Junior Historians of Texas.

Preamble

We, the Members of the Junior Historians, in order to stimulate interest in the history of Texas and Williamson County, add to the exhibits of the Junior History Museum, assist in the collection of books and historical documents for the Texas section of the Hopewell Library, and to assist the Williamson County Historical Commission to identify and preserve the historical landmarks in Texas, do hereby ordain and establish this constitution for the Junior Historians of Hopewell Middle School, Round Rock, Texas.

Article 1 The name of this organization shall be the Hopewell Junior Historians.

Article 2 All students who are interested in the history of our country and state shall be eligible for membership.

Article 3

Section 1. The officers of the club shall be: President, Vice-president, Secretary, Treasurer, Reporter, Parliamentarian, and Club Historian.

Section 2. The duties of the President shall be: to preside over meetings, to appoint committees, and to perform any other duties proper to the office.

Section 3. The Vice-president shall preside in the absence of the president and shall aid the president in organizing meetings and events.

Section 4. The Parliamentarian shall monitor that the club meetings follow the guidelines in Robert's Rule of order and this constitution.

Section 5. The Secretary shall keep a proper record of all meetings and the names and addresses of all members and shall conduct most of the correspondence of the club. The secretary shall also make reports to the local newspaper and school paper.

Section 6. The Treasurer shall receive any money due the club, and pay bills when properly authorized.

Section 7. The Reporter shall keep records of the club's financial transaction.

Section 8. The Club Historian shall keep a scrapbook composed of clippings from the various newspapers, and a collection of the outstanding papers of the society and photographs of the various club activities.

Article 4 Officers shall be elected to serve for a year. Officers shall be proposed by a nominating committee with the floor open to further nomination for each office. No officer shall be allowed to hold the same office in succession. Grades need to be kept up. No officer, missing three consecutive meetings, may hold a position.

Article 5 Meetings shall be held on Thursdays of every month, with the exception of conflicts in the school's schedule.

Article 6 All resignations will be submitted in written form to the president for officer position.

Article 7 These bylaws may be amended by two-thirds vote of the members at any regular meeting.

Article 8 The members shall be required to notify either the president and/or secretary in event of absence.