

How to Run a CAN Group



Secularists from the Atheist Alliance of America's convention in Boston

**Leading
Community Initiatives
with Secular Values**



What You'll Find Inside

Want to help drive the secular movement? This booklet tells you everything you need to know about starting a local chapter of the Community Action Network (CAN), a project of the Secular Policy Institute, the world's biggest secular think tank and world's biggest coalition of secular groups. Using CAN's philosophy your group will dramatically outpace most nonprofits, making an impact far greater than your size on behalf of secular values. Here you'll find hand-picked and little known best practices to bring you newfound influence in your community that may surprise you.

Enjoy this toolkit. Then call us for a warm welcome. Our support is yours for the asking. We look forward to speaking with you!

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Welcome

I'm Edwina Rogers, the secular leader whose organization produced this guide. This booklet is for you if privately not believing in God just isn't enough. Like us, you want to make a difference. You want to advocate for reason and science. You want to end discrimination against secular people. And you want to do it right.

What mistakes are we making, and what's the most effective way to promote secular goals? We solve that question with [Community Action Network](http://www.CommunityActionNetwork.org), a new type of secular group with local chapters across the United States. We join neighborhood initiatives and solve local problems. We have energy, resources, and community spirit!



This easy-to-read booklet will show you how to set up a local CAN group and how our **powerful new philosophy** will take your members past monthly movie nights to your being **widely acknowledged as a key leader of a key group at the center of your community**.



Of course secular people should socialize...



But CAN groups make real change for secular values, through strategic contributions to their communities

Whether you lead an existing group that may affiliate with CAN, or whether you're starting a group from scratch, this booklet is your toolkit. We summarize **critical management secrets** that will make maximum use of your limited time and springboard you far past the influence that local groups normally have. If you've been frustrated by not getting enough neighborhood attention, we have the answers!

Then we back up our advice with direct support. After reading this guide, call us. We'll support you locally with funding, training, outreach, and our extensive list of connections to local decision-makers in every metro area in the United States. We are eager to build better communities. Together we CAN!

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What is the Secular Movement?

Are you a fan of science? Like many of us, you're excited about the potential of the human race to lift itself out of poverty through technology and social change, to live longer, healthier, and better. Across the world there are millions of people who support education on topics often called STEM: science, technology, engineering, and math. Technophiles often work together in local clubs and advocacy groups.

Secular people are the technophiles that see deeper, because we don't believe in God. This frees us from the unchecked deference that religious people often have to authority and faith. We call ourselves atheists, humanists, freethinkers, and other terms, but a label we all accept is "secular people". The word *secular* refers to the real world without superstition.

We aren't defined by a negative, our "nonbelief". Instead we embrace a positive, scientific way of seeing the world. We just support evidence and rational thinking as problem-solving techniques that everyone should learn, even if they have no interest in a career in technology. Have you got a problem? Learn the facts and think hard. You could solve a lot of local community issues that way!



Magdalena from the "This is What an Atheist Looks Like" Campaign

Take for example the social controversy about vaccinating children. Although thousands of research studies prove that vaccines save millions of lives a year, one fraudulent 1998 research paper, which was retracted, created a tornado of misinformation and hysteria, convincing some families that vaccines may harm their children. Hundreds of children have died from not being vaccinated.

This kind of muddy thinking is what the secular community opposes. We advocate for reason and science in local community decision-making. When religions promote blind faith, to us that seems too much like blind following the blind. And when religious people claim to speak for the entire community, they marginalize secular people, and that's discrimination. All opinions should be heard, but using the word "faith" should not be a trump card that ends public discourse. Our local communities are diverse, where no group should claim superiority. Crime statistics show that secular Americans are just as moral as religious Americans.

Making change is a challenge that secular people are well positioned for! We are smart, we have energy, and there are so many of us that we cannot be ignored if we speak up. Secular people comprise some 2% to 20% of the United States, depending on how you count us, and we have many allies. Plenty of religious people and community stakeholder groups support our goals to use more rational thinking in local decision-making and to end to discrimination against nonbelievers.

Are you a fan of science? Help us make a difference in the world. Affiliate your group with the Community Action Network (CAN), or start a new local CAN group.

You can learn more about secularism in our guide, "*Who are Secular People? Myths and Facts About the Biggest Minority You've Never Heard Of*" at www.CommunityActionNetwork.org.

The Big Problem with the Secular Movement

We number many but have the power of a few

If you're already the leader of a secular group, then you know that the secular movement is not growing as quickly as it could be. Although as many as 20% of Americans do not belong to an organized religion, and 2.4% openly say they are atheist, we have nothing like the mainstream influence of similarly sized minorities, such as Jewish people and Mormons. Social acceptance of secular people is not rising as quickly as it has for the better organized gay rights movement.

Studies of the LBTGQ movement have shown that Americans are far more likely to support equal rights if they know an openly gay person in their personal lives. It's hard to hate someone you know. Unfortunately, secular people are known mostly when our celebrities say controversial things to draw media attention. It's said that any kind of publicity is good publicity, but as a movement we have **increased not reduced mainstream discrimination against us:**

- Creating controversy is a tactic, not a goal. We need to promote reason and end discrimination.
- We put too much energy into converting new people to nonbelief considering that our movement fails to inspire and harness its existing membership. Let's stop proselytizing and dramatically increase our current people-power by adopting best practices of groups like the American Cancer Society.
- Attack ads don't convince anyone. Religious people rationalize or accept flaws in their faith.
- Attacking religion makes nonbelievers seem angry and condescending, feeding discrimination.
- Attacking religion makes believers feel defensive, more likely to strike out and less to hear us.
- Attacking religion distances us from churches, schools, community leaders, and other local stakeholders who otherwise might support our goals to end discrimination and convince neighborhoods to use more facts and reason in their decision-making.

Religion in the United States

Christian	73
Protestant	48
White evang.	19
White mainline	15
Black Protestant	8
Other minority Prot.	6
Catholic	22
Mormon	2
Orthodox	1
Other faith	6
Unaffiliated	19.6
Atheist	2.4
Agnostic	3.3
Nothing in particular	13.9
Don't know	2
	100

Source: Pew Center, 2012



Stop it. You're making it worse for the secular movement.

Public Outreach: Stop the Debate Team

More importantly, our entire approach is wrong when we communicate through overly cerebral, "debate team" talking points. Most people just don't think that way. Human beings make choices emotionally. *They only listen to people they know and like.*

So what's the big problem with the secular movement? It's us. Secular people are numerous enough to dramatically change our place in the world, but we need a new strategy. We need to get known and liked.

Local secular groups can help with that. In the United States, secular people gather already in more than 1,000 small organizations. Unfortunately, most of these groups are too inwards-facing. Our social events and lectures create an important safe zone, but shelter us too much from outsiders.

Also, when secular groups do reach out, they tend to do it through advertisements, public demonstrations, and press releases. These techniques can draw support, but are too distant and one-sided. Many community groups take on volunteer projects, but then fail to get noticed, or fail to do it in partnership with other groups, or fail to choose strategic initiatives that the community cares about, or fail to do it in a manner where secular values are shown to make a difference to the outcome. Community Action Network has a transformative new approach to the idea that secular groups should volunteer. It's a refocusing around a single word: engagement.

Our Transformative New Approach

To engage our communities, we need to take an interest in local issues that our community is already grappling with, such as where to build handicapped ramps and how to organize food donations. Volunteer tasks and community planning aren't as glamorous as inviting a nationally famous scientist to lecture to your local group, but they make a real difference to people who need help, and engage us with our neighborhoods. We live in our neighborhoods. We and our neighbors can get excited about that.

As secular people, our analytical approach to problem solving is powerful. We have great energy and community spirit. We can play a major role in neighborhood initiatives, building rapport and good will with stakeholder groups such as families, schools, local government, and other community groups, both religious and non-religious.

We don't need to secretly push an agenda. We'll solve local issues through secularism, get known for who we really are, and naturally and organically become an accepted part of public discourse. That will end discrimination. That will get us a normalized place in society. There will be no need for us to generate controversy to be heard. We will already have arrived.

That's the power of Community Action Network.



Community Action Network: The Solution

Don't Convert. Find Common Ground.

Community Action Network (CAN) directly addresses the biggest problem in the secular movement: our need to be known and build good will with community stakeholders who, like it or not, have the social power to include us or exclude us. They can:

- Help us end discrimination against nonbelievers
- Help us get accepted as normal, participating members of public discourse and society
- Help us advocate for a rational, evidence-based approach to problem solving



It's not hard to find common ground with neighborhood organizations. Many local families, religious communities, schools, journalists, government leaders, business leaders, and non-profits will help us. We don't have to shed our nonbelief, and we don't have to convert people to nonbelief to get them to make choices that include secularists in the community, lessening discrimination.

While we will always be grateful for early advocates who support us immediately and respond to an intellectual approach, the best way to build broad support is to allow relationships to develop naturally between secular groups and local stakeholders. CAN group members contribute to the local projects that schools, churches, and other community leaders care about, and the rest organically follows.

Clever Idea: Start with Schools

Few secular people belong to a church or other non-profit group, so we lack contacts there. So let's start with school communities. Those of us with children have plenty of relationships at schools with administrators, teachers, parents, and students. These friends will help us get our foot in the door, politely pushing back on the people who might want to ban us from participating. Getting close to schools puts us closer to resources, such as meeting spaces, vehicles, and volunteers, and puts us closer to an endless series of student initiatives that the community values highly. Once we are seen appropriately as part of a school community, it becomes a launching pad for the entire neighborhood, because the entire neighborhood is involved with schools somehow.

We will need patience and consistent effort to develop personal relationships with school leaders, coaches, and fellow parents. Our intention is never to manipulate or create false intimacy. From our experiences with church members who do good deeds but can't stop proselytizing, we know how annoying it is to suspect that a service group cares more about self-promotion than giving aid. As people who live in neighborhoods, we genuinely care about our community issues, so let's show it. We know that volunteering, with a modest acknowledgement of our beliefs so that we don't go completely unnoticed, will naturally lead to building good will for secular people as a minority. That is enough for us. If we put community goals ahead of our own, but in a smart way, we will earn a durable, grounded, invaluable type of respect for secular people. This is soft power, which far more valuable than the surface-level respect we might get by pushing our way into a parade or demanding to be heard at a community meeting.

What CAN Groups Do

Get Organized

First, form a new local group as a chapter of the Community Action Network, or affiliate your existing secular group with us. Two or three parents of students with two or three teachers would be an ideal nucleus of a new CAN chapter. Draw members by reaching out to friends and members of like-minded groups: book clubs, skeptic groups, science groups, and more. Be creative. We've had great luck manning tables at fan conventions for comic books and movies.

CAN groups don't proselytize or attack religion in any way. Community service is our primary function, and we must remain vigilant that we don't allow social events to dominate our mentality. We offer to assist local community initiatives, then start our own projects and invite the neighborhood to help us back.

Pick Popular Projects

As secular people, we love out-of-town authors who visit to sell books and lecture on secularism. We struggle to bring in the biggest speakers and entertainment to make our weekly meetings interesting and meaningful. These events don't excite the rest of the community.

Fortunately, the interests of secular people are hardly limited to "foreign" speakers from outside our communities! As community residents, we also love the more natural, dirty fingernail, locally meaningful programming such as school plays, anti-hunger efforts, art supplies, scholarships, tutoring, student field trips, teacher recognitions, scholastic competitions, and showing school spirit at sporting events. These are the projects that will build local influence for CAN. We want to become famous for our energetic boosters clubs, with members who just happen to be secular people.

We also want to choose projects that showcase the power of fact-finding and rational thought. The coach of a softball league has great visibility, but often acts alone. There isn't much complicated community decision-making in setting up practice times. Choose instead to raise money for new equipment, plan a field trip to play a team in a distant state, or build a new softball field. Join projects that do require planning, like disaster relief and public transportation initiatives. Once you've chosen a project that *inherently* demonstrates the worth of secular values, you are free to put the project foremost and never worry that the reasons that secularism is special go unnoticed.

End Discrimination

Secular people want more than to end discrimination. We want our rightful influence in the world. But ending discrimination is the way to get there.

It may take a years to grow a committed group of secular members, cultivate warm relationships with principals, teachers, coaches, and school committees, but sooner than you think, your CAN group will be seen as a contributing and integral part of school life. You will be regularly invited to new initiatives. Your opinion will be asked when decisions need to be made. You will be celebrated at awards functions. The more they get to know us secular people, the more normalized we will be.

This will affect everything over time. Secular people will no longer be ostracized by family and friends. We'll feel safer being open about who we are in the workplace and to government. Politicians will see secular people as an important voting bloc, and everyone will be able to say, "I know some secular people, and they're just like me." This future will come sooner the more we work towards it through the CAN approach.

What's In It for You?

Benefits to the Community

We spend most of our lives ignorant of people in need. From foreign wars to local homeless shelters, we feel sometimes that if we started to care, if we started to play a role in helping people, that it could take over our lives.

What you may not know is that volunteerism itself transforms this mindset. Volunteerism isn't just about helping strangers. The people you help become friends. Just like exercising ultimately makes you feel healthier and energized, there is something about community service that wakes up the spirit.

You start seeing the big picture of how your neighborhood operates and communicates. Underneath the series of buildings and organizations, it's really a network of individuals, and everyone has their own story. You get to be a part of that story. When you build community, your projects take on a life of their own with an impact that may last for decades or centuries. You get to say, "We did it!"

Unlike religious people, secular people don't have an automatic answer to finding a purpose in life. Helping other people should be on your list. Community projects take on a positive spiral effect, raising standards of living, raising property values, and actualizing children and adults who just need a boost to become community contributors themselves.

Somewhere in your community there is an overworked leader with a great idea that she or he can't quite implement. Choose your contributions wisely and they could be the trigger to activating something with enormous and central impact to your neighborhood.

Benefits to the Secular Movement

Why should you volunteer for the secular movement? You could just as easily join a cancer charity. Cancer kills millions of people every year. There are few more worthy causes.

However, making a difference in the world means maximizing your leverage. American cancer charities already raise \$2.4 billion annually, with millions of contributors supporting thousands of scientists. Your participation in such a movement won't change it much.

The secular movement is completely different. For the first time in history, it's in a sweet spot where it is still so ineffective that even basic contributions matter. Yet the demographics of social acceptance of secularism make our movement primed for rapid growth. From the mainstream attention that we have gotten in the last decade, it's clear that our time of being a lost cause is over. We are ready to springboard into the future.

So the time is right for a few key individuals to make a big impact, allowing new members and resources to flood into advocacy for reason and science. We'd like you to be one of those key individuals.

Why help the secular movement? It's vital. The secular movement doesn't save many lives in the United States, but it has a gargantuan and foundational, if unacknowledged, effect on society, because secular attitudes change how decisions are made. Thus secularism changes everything. Secular issues permeate every area of society, from families who ostracize each other over their religious differences up to worldwide religious conflicts that could be resolved with fact-driven rational thinking.

Helping the secular movement benefits us personally as well. Our voices will be heard more, we will feel safer being open about who we are, and society will tend to choose more grounded, more evidence-based, and therefore more effective solutions, making everyone happier. It's an excellent choice for your volunteer efforts.

Benefits to Your Group

For some secular people, living with secularism is hard. We may live in an area of the country where discrimination is especially high. We may have family members or a workplace situation where we cannot be ourselves or from which we have been ostracized. Leaving a deep faith such as Mormonism or Islam can cut someone off from an entire support network and create mental minefields as we shed old habits and try to find stable new philosophical ground. Although violence against nonbelievers is rare in the United States, some of us have family in fear for their lives overseas, and some of us may be driven to depression or thoughts of suicide by the pressure that society puts us under.

You can help. By starting a CAN group, in the long term you help the secular movement, but in the short term, you can provide immediate help to secular people. You create a safe space where members can be themselves and understand that they are not alone. You create a sense of empowerment by giving members something to do that will ultimately improve things for themselves and for those in the next generation. You are changing lives.

It's easy to say, "It's only a club," but don't underestimate your power to help people take charge of their lives. As a secular leader, you most likely have your life in order, and you have the charisma, energy, and organizational skills to make things happen. Not everyone has those skills. You'll find secular people in your community who are aching to be trained to be more effective and then put into action. Before joining your group, they may have felt too overwhelmed by the complexities of volunteering to take an active role in the secular community. Or they may have felt too alone to take the social risk of joining a volunteer project as an open nonbeliever. With your help, your members push through whatever has been holding them back. They'll learn new skills, make new friends, and find themselves happier being engaged with their community and making a difference.

The best leaders talent scout and mentor team members. They encourage them to run their own giant projects or leave to start a synergistic new group of their own. There's no better way to maximize your impact on the world than to inspire others and train them to take your shared goals and run with them.

Benefits to You

It's normal if you worry that running a group may be too much stress. We have good news. Let us train you in a few secret management tips, because running a group can and will be fulfilling instead. Do you have members who cause drama? We'll show how to sidestep them. Are you running yourself ragged? We'll show ways to delegate that will surprise you. Do you feel underappreciated? As the leader of your group, you set the "culture", the social principles by which your members interact. It's your group, so change it to a thankful, supportive one. You have so much power to make it your experience as a group leader fulfilling, tremendous, world-changing, and life-affirming.

We know, because our group is like that. Community Action Network is different from most secular organizations in that the support we give you is substantive and deliciously smart. Most secular groups are run by gifted amateurs who mean well but lack experience running large organizations. They measure their success against other secular groups, instead of against established nonprofits such as the YMCA

and American Red Cross. At CAN, we know we can do better, and we want to be a part of the truly professional and effective non-profit world.

As the leader of a CAN group, this benefits you because you'll get all the professional training that you want from us. Our techniques and coaching will further your personal development and improve your career. You'll get more done in every area of your life. A referral from CAN may help you nail your next job interview.

Running a local CAN group puts you not just at the center of your membership, but at the center of your community. It's a fantastic way to build a professional network, and you don't have to be a real estate agent to find it useful to have friends in high places all over town. You'll meet and work with some interesting characters! Community leaders who run the stakeholder groups in your metro area are high energy, principle-driven, inspiring people who are fascinating to get to know. You're going to have a lot of stories to tell about your adventures, and you'll learn even more tips and techniques about professional management from those who have been doing it for decades.

As well as making influential allies, you'll form real friendships both within your group and outside. Running a CAN group is the ultimate icebreaker. You always have an excuse to reach out, to meet, and to keep up with your acquaintances, some of whom will become great friends. Life is funny and you never can tell what's coming next. Don't underestimate the serendipity of being at the center of dozens or hundreds of positive, caring, similar thinking people. There's a good chance that one of them will transform your life completely.

How to Start a Local CAN Group

How We're Structured

Together we CAN! Community Action Network (CAN) is a project of the Secular Policy Institute (SPI), the world's largest think tank and world's largest coalition of secular groups. Based in Washington, DC, SPI and its coalition advocate for secular values internationally, working with national governments around the world. Complementary to SPI's top-down approach to secularization, CAN is more of a dirty-fingernail, locally oriented, bottom-up secularizer.

Some local CAN groups are completely new. Others were existing groups that chose to affiliate with us. Through you we can act at the local level everywhere. Through us you can get resources such as funding, training, and help with marketing and website development. We can also plug you into our relationships with local decision-makers in media, business, community organizations, and government, in every major metro region in the US.

You can phrase your affiliation with CAN any way you like. Of course, if you use specific language of affiliation, that makes it easier for us to showcase your accomplishments as part of our winning national strategy. Groups that add "CAN" to their name, use our logo, call themselves chapters, or if that's uncomfortable for you, negotiate some kind of substantial affiliation with us, and get a share of our resources. It's up to you. The most important thing is that we wish to work with local groups that share our high impact philosophy. One of the great benefits of the local school CAN approach is having an affordable and well-equipped facility in which to hold Community Action Network meetings of all sizes.

Our Philosophy

To be a local CAN group, your organization would agree with us on our approach to success. We want more than a loose camaraderie with like-minded people who might do some good. *We want you to be effective.* This means your signing up for some best practices and targeted ways to perform. If you have an existing group its own unique culture, we may ask you to make some minor changes. But there will always be a reasonable amount of wiggle room, so let's discuss. You'll find more in this guide about why we believe these principles will launch your group and the entire secular movement into mainstream success. We'll be eager to talk through our reasoning, the evidence behind our philosophy, and the details of putting theory into practice.

CAN groups should:

- **Support these five goals:**
 - To use more science and reason in community decision-making,
 - To end discrimination against secular people,
 - To build good will and become recognized neighborhood stakeholders,
 - To do good by contributing to neighborhood initiatives, and
 - To have fun and inspire our members and partners.
- **Be led by secular people.** CAN groups are open to everyone, and the point of CAN is to partner with community stakeholders outside our movement. But our leaders should be personally

embedded in our cause. Secular people do not believe in God, do not belong to a religion, and do not subscribe to conspiracy beliefs such as Bigfoot or UFOs. They support science and reason.

- **Contribute to local initiatives.** The purpose of CAN is secularize local communities. Similar to a Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO), we do this through volunteer work and joining planning committees. We partner with our school and neighborhood stakeholders and invite them to our own projects. We put the work first and don't oversell ourselves. Being useful to our partners is the most effective way to get them to invite us back, over and over, until secular people are a normalized part of everything they do.
- **Advocate for science and reason, in context.** CAN groups don't advocate for our philosophy, although we may advertise for new members. We don't make abstract, overly cerebral arguments that science is better than faith because this just isn't effective. It's like telling people that jazz music is good without suggesting any artists or albums. We heavily promote fact-based thinking, but we do it in the context of discussing specific community issues. That makes our case much clearer, and steers us away from high-minded rhetoric that might be seen to attack religion.
- **Avoid attacks on religion.** CAN groups are opposed to blind faith reasoning, but so are some religious organizations, so an attack on religion is missing the point. At CAN, we'll partner with any group that shares a common goal. We actively work to show respect even to those in our community who dislike us, not because we enjoy being the victims of abuse, but because there is no way to end discrimination through negative messaging. It backfires every time. We definitely shouldn't be hinting at discrimination lawsuits when trying to get access to community discussions and resources.
- **Avoid proselytizing.** We are diplomatic when it comes to expressing our values and drawing new members. Our winning strategy is to form the soft power of deep, grounded relationships. Proselytizing will just annoy people. Let them get to know us for who we are, and our beliefs will come up as a natural part of the conversation. There's no effective way to shortcut that process.
- **Embrace professional norms.** Anyone can put together a book club. If you want influence in your community, lift your sights and take operational cues from the groups that already have influence. They are run by organized people who know how to manage meetings and budgets, charismatic leaders who know how to engage with partner groups and make them feel rewarded, and disciplined people who have the focus to spend resources wisely and make themselves valuable to others. It's easier than you think, and we can train you in these things.
- **Make diversity more than a word.** Too many groups say they value diversity, but don't have any. CAN groups know that the secret to welcoming minorities, gay people, women, the differently abled, different age groups, and those who are not secular but want to help, is to ask them how they want to be welcomed. Then put energy into welcoming them. It's an important part of breaking the stereotype that atheists are angry young white men. It's a good exercise for you to feel what it must be like to run a religious organization and have secular people drive up and make a few special requests to feel welcomed and included.
- **Foster a goal-driven culture.** As the leader of a CAN group, you set the tone of how your members interact. We should always make our projects fun, and social events should be part of every CAN group, but we do not allow socializing to take over. Members should join to make a difference in the community. We choose our projects to make an impact and build good will with

neighborhood stakeholders. Sometimes that will mean getting our hands dirty with initiatives that aren't glamorous, but you can lead your members to see the value in helping the community.

- **No room for troublemakers.** The moral principle that everyone should be heard breaks down when one person dominates the group with negative energy, personal attacks, or constant calls for attention. As the group leader, don't allow poison pill members to sap the energy of your membership. It's unpleasant, but there is far less pain when these people are asked to leave. You will be accused of shutting down opinions. Own it. It is your group. Don't do it in an authoritarian, manipulative, surprise attack, or unempathetic way, but sometimes yes, you must shut down opinions or kick people out. As a leader, it's your job to guide your group, and there is no other way to manage a professional organization but to make occasional hard choices. Then invest your energy finding new members who will contribute with a good attitude.
- **Coordinate with national CAN.** Some national non-profits with local chapters never hear from them, even when leadership changes, and we don't want that kind of relationship with you. As a CAN group you have great autonomy to choose the projects you think best, but coordinate with us. Ask for our help. We can contribute so much to your group, and when we can accelerate your initiatives to the next level, we can take a share of the credit and promote that success to further your goals locally and our own goals in other areas of the country. We'd like your membership as a local CAN group to be substantial. We'd like to build a camaraderie with you, with your drawing surprising resources you didn't expect us to offer, and your rewarding us with surprising progress in your neighborhood.

Joining CAN Officially

To become an official CAN group, go to www.CommunityActionNetwork.org and click 'Join' in the top menu to fill out the easy form on our website. Then let's set up a phone call to go through all the details.

Once we've agreed to work together, you are welcome to use the names Community Action Network and CAN on your website and messaging, as well as our national logo. We'll also make you a local version of our logo.

You don't need to be formally incorporated to become a local CAN group. Filing as a non-profit is something you will only need to do if you wish to accept tax-deductible donations, or if you have so much success that it's time to get a bank account. When the time comes, filing the paperwork is easier than most people think. We have helped dozens of groups get their formal status, and we will walk you through every step.



The national CAN logo and a sample regional CAN logo

You don't need a constitution or bylaws to become a local CAN group. You may need them to file as a non-profit, or if your group is based at a school that requires such things. Frankly we find the paperwork of founding a group a drain on the enthusiasm of its members. The best way to get started is to launch yourselves into your first community project. The paperwork can wait.

Your First Meeting

If you have two or three parents of students, two or three teachers, and, perhaps, two or three secular neighbors, you have the ideal base for a great CAN group. If you cannot readily assemble such an ideal base, you may need to search a bit for other secular people. You can find them through your personal

network and by asking like-minded groups in your area if they will mention your existence to their members through their social media or newsletter. Ask for help from:

- Existing secular, science, and skeptic groups
- The school you've chosen to build close relations with first
- Student organizations that work with the community
- Volunteer groups
- Technology hobby clubs
- Small business and entrepreneur networking groups
- Groups that support science education
- Civil rights and social justice groups
- Unitarian Universalist churches and other liberal religious organizations
- Debate teams, book clubs, lecture series, museum membership clubs, and other academic clubs
- Minority, gay, and women's rights groups that may trade support with us
- Minority religious groups such as Muslims and pagans who support religious freedom for themselves and will trade support with us on our own quest to end discrimination
- Other community groups, especially those whose initiatives you plan to support

Hold your first meeting in a quiet place with plenty of room for everyone to stand up, walk around, and socialize, and where you can address the entire group easily. A restaurant is a poor location, because attendees will feel confined to their tables, able to speak with only the few people around them, and because you cannot raise your voice to speak with everyone. We recommend someone's private home, an available meeting space at a school or local business, or a private function space at a hotel or restaurant.

Serve free food if you can afford it. Free food is the least expensive way to build good will with your members. Or make it a potluck event. Get the food and socializing out of the way before you begin any business. Then you'll have the best possible mood and the least interruption.

In your invitation, say that you're actively seeking community groups to attend your first meeting and present their initiatives. You and your members will then discuss and select the first projects that you want to devote attention to. See? You are already building neighborhood connections.

Potential projects should further your group's goal of engaging with your local school community. They should:

- Be cared about deeply by the community
- Genuinely excite your CAN group members
- Have enough planning complexity to showcase your secular decision-making skills
- Target big stakeholder groups that have the power to help you integrate with the neighborhood
- Make you visible to the wider community, through interacting with a large number of people, or through having visuals that can be photographed and bragged about

The key to your first meeting is the experience that your new members have. Don't weigh down the momentum with lengthy thank yous or formalities such as voting on by-laws. Energize your members by discussing the promise of the secular movement and its problems, as this booklet has outlined. Introduce the new philosophy of CAN and potential community initiatives that your group might join. Moderate discussion and ask every member, perhaps privately, what inspires them and what role they might see themselves having. People respond to warm, personal attention. CAN solves a problem that many secular people have been feeling. You can brag about the influence of CAN, the credentials of its staff,

and its parent group the Secular Policy Institute, which is the world's biggest secular think tank and the world's biggest secular coalition.

In short, have fun with it. Your enthusiasm will become their enthusiasm. The details will come later. Congratulations on your new group!

Working with Schools

As you have read in this booklet, a school will be a natural first partnership for your local CAN group. Through CAN members who have schoolchildren, you will have existing relationships with school administrators, teachers, students, student clubs, and PTOs that can be leveraged to get invited to help solve local problems. Schools provide important resources such as meeting spaces, auditoriums, audiovisual equipment, computer labs, vehicles, outdoor spaces, and sports equipment.

You don't need to be affiliated formally with a school to help with school initiatives and function like a Parent-Teach Organization (PTO) or PTA. Building warm personal relationships with school stakeholders comes first. However, if you want to draw upon school resources, you will need to become an official PTO or PTA. Certainly official groups are perceived to "have more business" taking a role in school issues. If the process seems overwhelming, or you encounter discrimination, contact us and we'll help.

Leadership Roles in Your CAN Group

Now it's time to delegate roles to your most dedicated members. CAN groups are open to anyone, but we ask that those in leadership roles be deeply and consistently secular people, people who are not superstitious and are strongly committed to reason and science.

We discourage you from creating a rigid hierarchy, but giving your members titles can inspire them. Strong titles also give your team clout when they are interacting with the outside world. So your leaders should have named roles. If you organize formally as a non-profit, named roles will be necessary.

It's tempting to hold an election, but professional corporations and non-profits are not run this way. Take your cues from these proven success stories. Elections can generate friction between your members and waste energy on administration that should be going into community initiatives. Elections in small groups, where everyone knows each other personally, are rarely more than popularity contests, which means that your most effective leaders may not even win office. Hold elections if you wish to, but we recommend you privately asking the recommendations of all your key members and then appoint positions.

In the rush of creating a new group, it's easy to simply choose the people who are the most available, and give them any role. This can be dangerous. There is no rush to flesh out your executive team. As you take on your first couple of projects, the projects themselves can drive who does what. It's far easier to postpone having new leaders than to pick the wrong person and have to remove them, causing them to lose face. Make sure that the people for each job have the temperament to work well in a group, to learn from their mistakes, and have the energy and organizational focus to get the job done. Those attributes are generally more important than skill, because people with the right attitude can learn new skills.

It's also dangerous to appoint a close friend to a role unless you feel that your friendship is strong enough that you would be able to remove him or her if needed. You'll need to discuss expectations and get your friend to agree that the group must put group needs ahead of the friendship of two members, even when one of those friends is you, the group's leader. Create a mental picture of what it might be like to have to remove your friend from responsibility, and if you start to feel too guilty, that might be a sign that you have chosen them out of love and respect more than for the good of the group. Sometimes it's better to assign friends whose skills are unproven to vague, unofficial roles, so that they can be more diplomatically "relocated to Siberia" if you need to make a switch.

Depending on your size, your group may need people in the following categories:

- **A President or Executive Director** administers everything and sets the group's cultural tone.
- **A Communications Director or Public Relations Manager** organizes everything that is written on your website, sent to social media, and put into press releases.
- **A Finance Director or Treasurer** handles your budget and bank account.
- **An Alliance Director or Community Coordinator** partners with school and community groups.
- **A Service Director or Project Coordinator** takes on specific initiatives. One person may take on multiple projects, or you may give each initiative to a different coordinator.
- **An IT Director or Technology Coordinator** keeps your website and email list going.
- **A Secretary or Deputy Director** helps the President keep the membership list, track activities and goals, write agendas, minutes, and reports, and makes sure you never drop a responsibility.

Others who bring food, take photographs, write your newsletter, and otherwise assist may deserve a title. A title is a nice acknowledgement, but it also places an entire role on the shoulders of one person, who may not have time to do it all, and where others might like to co-own the responsibility.

10 Secrets to Managing a Group

The Secret to Setting Goals

Most secular groups measure their success by asking, “Did we grow in size over last year?” or, “How are we doing against other secular groups?” Unfortunately, most secular groups are run at an amateur level, so the comparison fails to lift your sights. CAN groups want to be truly effective at making an impact on their communities, so compare your group to the most successful neighborhood stakeholders on your:

- **Originality and impact** of project ideas
- **Positive media attention** in school and local news
- **Upbeat project reports** on your website
- **Professional photos** of your leaders and accomplishments
- **Mentions in the news**, even as supporters of someone else’s initiative
- **Website** appearance, clarity, and age of new posts
- **Social media** size of your following, quality of posts, and frequency
- **Ease of joining and donating**. Does the website draw people in or confuse them?
- **Sponsors and allies** listed on your website
- **Frequency of project initiatives**
- **Clarity of purpose**. Are your goals obvious to those who attend in person or visit the website?
- **Organizational quality**, which should be obvious to anyone who attends your project event

This list may feel overwhelming. Especially in the first year, your group will have less funding, less stature, and fewer people than the established role model groups that you wish to emulate. Fortunately, there are some inexpensive tricks to at least taking on the appearance of a much bigger group. That will shore up your reputation as you are bootstrapping to actually get to that level.

- **Overinvest in your online presence.** Even the biggest community stakeholders make the mistake of underinvesting in their online presence. With a bit of work this allows us to look as successful as they are. Start with social media, which especially to young people is more important than your website presence. How your website looks on mobile devices is vital, too.
- **Take great photos.** Photos are vital to your website and materials, so don’t shortchange them. Even the least important events and team meetings look great with good visuals. Don’t say yes to the first amateur with a camera who volunteers. Find someone with skill and take the time at your events to set up photos that are well lit, well composed, and show member diversity.
- **Have confidence.** Secular people are good at organizing, so even the smallest groups should take pride in what they can contribute to a larger initiative. Don’t allow doubts about your small size to come through in your emails and body language.
- **Do one thing very well.** You won’t have the resources to take on all the outreach and initiatives of your area’s biggest nonprofits. Resist the temptation to stretch your group too thin. You may not be able to field a website, newsletter, or social media, but that’s okay if your work in the community is impressive. It’s better to think, “What’s the best investment that I can make, to have an original, newsworthy, ‘wow’ moment outcome that will impress newcomers and partners, especially partners with community influence?”

With great focus, and great project ideas, you will quickly be treated as an established group. So how do you get great ideas?

Where Great Ideas Come From

The problems and pleasures found in the local school news will offer a truly rich source of great and practical ideas. There's nothing wrong with holding a bake sale to raise money. But what about something fun and newsworthy like a dance competition, a kayak race, or running a charity haunted house at Halloween? When you take ordinary ideas and make them extraordinary, you inspire members, raise more from donors, make a splash in the media, and impress your partners.

The secret to good ideas is to look around. What are local groups doing, not just in your city, but anywhere in the United States, that was original enough to deserve a mention in a newspaper? Or a full story on the front page? Take those ideas and adapt them to your local area, and to your secular mentality.

Join the newsletters of other school and local community groups and stay on top of the projects that they are sponsoring that you might like to join. Be one of the first to volunteer makes you stand out from other groups and seem eager. That will get you more attention in return. Be first by knowing first. Trade private emails with school and community group leaders to ask, "What's coming up that you haven't put in your newsletter yet?" Use Google Alerts at www.google.com/alerts to monitor community activity or find community bloggers who are already doing this research. Getting in on the group floor will make you seem like larger stakeholder in the project, because you will already be there when other groups arrive. This increased status will allow you to have more impact on the project and take more of the credit for its success.

Once you have a great idea, the best way to build support for it is to write it down. You'll be surprised as you record your plan, because you'll discover that a concept you felt was fully fleshed out in your head becomes crisper and less full of holes as you record it. Then revise the draft a few times to simplify the writing and remove redundancies. A good test for clarity is to read out loud what you've written. If it sounds conversational, the way that you would normally speak, it's probably clear.

If your idea is truly a great one, it will have a high impact component that surprises people. We call that the "wow factor" after the reaction you're hoping to get from the members and partners who read it. You want them to say, "Wow! I need to help out with this, and pass it along to my friends!" Work on your idea to maximize the wow. It's the emotional hook with substance behind it that drives volunteerism, donations, and community support.

Communicating with Wow

Whenever you speak to or email your members with a goal in mind, that's a form of marketing, and the #1 rule of marketing is that nobody cares. You have to make them care. People live busy lives and aren't going to automatically give you even their attention, never mind be biased to say yes.

Here's a master class in communication in three short pages. The below advice condenses best practices that will get far more people to say yes to you.

- The most important element of an email is not actually the subject line. It's the "From" field that tells you who the email is from. Use your own name rather than your organization's name, because that will make your note seem less like spam. Your goal is to make a personal connection with the recipient. So set up a professional looking email address for yourself with a real domain name that ends in .org or .com, and then use your own name in the email address, such as nancy@secularclub.org or ndrew@secularclub.org. Don't use an impersonal email

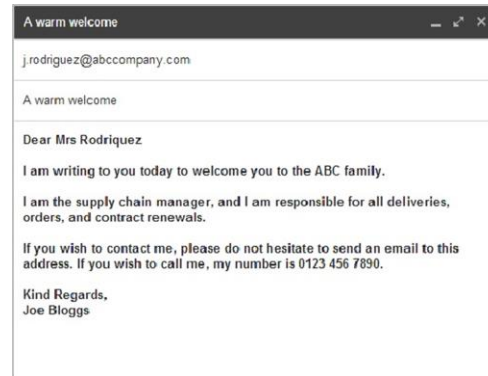
address such as info@secularclub.org or president@secularclub.org. Recipients want to know whom they are dealing with, right away.

- In emails, use the first name and organization name of your recipient in the subject line to demonstrate your email isn't spam. For example, your subject line might be "Michael - Bridgton Pet Shelter"
- Don't start with the word "Dear". Yes, they taught you that in high school. They were wrong. Professional emails are not opened this way. Start with one of these:
 - "Hi Charlie,"
 - "Sarah,"
 - "Good morning, Mary,"
- Don't end with "Sincerely". An efficient email has no signoff phrase, just a closing sentence and then your name and email signature. For example, your closing sentence might be "Thank you" or "I look forward to speaking with you." It's acceptable to end with "Warmly," or "Best wishes," but when writing to a stranger or acquaintance, it's disingenuous. Never end your email with a closer that could be perceived as a demand, such as "Please get back to me at your earliest convenience," or "I look forward to hearing from you promptly."
- Write a warm personal first sentence, even if the rest of your email is a form letter. For example:
 - "I'm writing to ask about Bridgton Pet Shelter. I notice that you're next to Barney's Diner. I love that place."
 - "My friend Rabbi Gelman mentioned your work with pet adoption to me."
 - "It's good to have an excuse to reach out to you, after hearing about the good work you do with pets. My own first pet was a black lab that came from an adoption center!"
- Make them care by keeping your audience in mind. What's in it for them? Think to yourself, if I were a potential donor or community partner, sitting down to check fifty emails, how much attention would I give an email from a stranger? A few seconds? Imagine that in your verbal voicemail or written email that your conversation is falling off of a cliff. You need to arrest that fall by saying something interesting immediately. Omit entirely what's in it for you. They don't want to read, "Working with you on this project will help boost our image across the city!" Focus on what's called the "value proposition," the reason *they* would want to work with *you*, and don't hold back on bragging. For example:
 - "We just raised more money for leukemia than any other local group at the Denver Walk for Cancer and now we'd like to help you with pet adoptions."
 - "We'd like to send you 20 volunteers this Christmas to help you with outreach."
 - "We have connections to school groups that care about pet adoption and think we can make a real difference to your shelter."

- Emails with many paragraph breaks are easier to scan quickly, and thus get read more completely. Emails that seem thick may be deleted or kept with the intention to read them at a later time, a time that never comes.



This email is so cluttered that glancing at it gives you no desire to read it.



This shorter email with many paragraph breaks you might read in full.

- Keep it short. Keep it even shorter. Nobody gives their full attention to email. We scan them quickly. Let's say that you write a long email with 20 paragraphs and 2 important points to make. There's a 10% chance that the reader's eye will go to your important point first. If you keep your email to just 2 points, with short paragraphs, you will communicate both even to a lazy reader.
- Hook the reader. The #1 mistake that most people make in written communication is saying too much. You don't need to explain your group's entire history and the project idea in full. Say just enough to intrigue the reader to respond. That mindset will help you keep it short.

The above advice applies to verbal communication as well. Get their attention, keep it short, and be clear. Speak slowly, because listeners need time to digest what you are saying. Most voicemail systems allow you to press '#' or some other button to rerecord your voicemail. Use that time traveling superpower to record your message until it sounds the way you want it to.

"Good morning, Janey, I hope you are doing well today. My name is Eduardo Saverin and I am the President of the Secular Club of Chicago and the reason for my call today is to ask whether someone in your organization would like to speak with me..."

A bad voicemail rambles. Arrest your fall with a 'wow' statement in the first few seconds.

"Hi Janey, I'm calling to offer you twenty volunteers for your pet shelter over the holidays. My name is..."

A good voicemail immediately gives your potential partner a reason to listen

If you have trouble telling the difference between clear and unclear writing, show what you've written to your members for their feedback. Ask them whether your emails feel ordinary or catch their attention. Ask whether they get the gist of your message with just a glance. There is no better way to maximize volunteerism, partnerships, and donations than communication that is easy to understand and has impact. It's worth the extra work.

Organized People Write Down Everything

It's simple but effective: the more you write things down, the better organized you become. If you are not naturally an organized person, find someone who is to be your Secretary or Deputy Director. You may wish to read *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, which is the best self-help book in this context, and it amuses us that its final page, the afterword, is a call to religion. Let's use it for secularism.

Write down everything, including:

- A list of members and whatever contact information you might need
- A list of tasks delegated to members and their deadlines
- A task list for each community initiative you are involved with
- Your ideas for projects you wish to join or to start
- A list of organizations you have reached out to, the contact information for their leaders, and when it's time to follow up if they don't respond
- Your group's standard operating procedures for tasks you take on all the time, such as how to make new posts to your website. That preserves your institutional memory.
- The passwords for your group's online accounts. Don't try to remember your passwords. That leads to lax security because your passwords will be easy to guess. Choose strong ones and then write them down.
- Resources such as driving instructions to a place you often have meetings

Whenever a partner or a member agrees to do something verbally, add a follow-up to a list of your own tasks, with a specific calendar date. Then send a clarifying email so that you have the promise recorded. You may be surprised how often this reveals a miscommunication that you'll want to correct. Putting your agreement in writing and casually mentioning a specific follow-up date is a real motivator to someone who may otherwise let the task slide.

How to Build Confidence in Your Organization

To grow your influence, you'll need your members, your partners, and your donors to trust you. You can take actions that build their confidence, or you can undermine it.

Don't keep your partners in the dark, because people as human beings tend to assume the worst in the absence of information. Not having heard from you recently, they will unfairly but understandably start to wonder if you have forgotten them. They're likely to imagine you sitting on a beach instead of working hard on their behalf. When you accomplish something, mention it and take credit for it. Get noticed.

Professional managers use a technique called "handholding", which means giving your stakeholders regular attention. Overcommunicate, not through overly long emails, but through the frequency that you write. Don't give in to the temptation to postpone your email update until you have something to say. Just say, "I wanted to let you know that we are still working on your issue and hope to have news next week." Giving a stakeholder the personal touch with a phone call is a nice gesture, too. Never leave your VIPs wondering whether you have defected to Russia. Be present for them.

Another way to build confidence is to do your homework. Are you calling a potential partner for the first time? Take a moment to read about their organization, and to look up their leaders online. They will appreciate that you took a genuine interest and came to the phone call well informed. Prepare for an upcoming meeting of community leaders by planning talking points and arriving with photocopied handouts with proposed agenda items. Your attitude is not to take over the meeting, but to propose additional items to discuss. It's best if you run this by whoever is formally running the meeting, but most

community meetings are not tightly managed so this may not be necessary. Proposing agenda items, especially in the absence of anyone else doing so, allows you to take the initiative at the meeting, driving it towards the issues you think most important. It also impresses people, building their confidence in you.

When community meetings get heated, it's vital that you keep your cool. The word "cool" reflects your body language and tone of voice. If you keep your emotions in check, that makes you cool, and people respect those with the discipline to stay on point. One wrong comment can trigger you to be ejected, even if you are in the right on the issue, or when someone else began the escalation.

Keeping your cool can be a challenge when someone at a community meeting wants to argue. Don't give them the satisfaction of responding in a way that says "yes" to their implied question, "Would you like to fight?" Deny them that pleasure. Most of the time argumentative people lack influence at a community meeting, so winning the approval of the more numerous and more level-headed attendees should be your goal. That goal is best served with a restrained, level-headed response.

Think, "What's the smartest thing I can do or say to get what I want from this meeting?" With that attitude, you'll see that rising to someone's bait with an emotional pot shot destroys confidence in your leadership. When you get into a stressful situation, or someone barks at you, you aren't obligated to reward them by responding directly to what they said. Comment on the meta-level of the conversation by acknowledging the tone of the exchange. For example, break the tension by pretending that you think your adversary is kidding. You might laugh and say, "Wow, Armand, I don't know if I'm supposed to swallow that comment whole or chew it one bite at a time! Why don't we talk about the budget for a moment instead?" Then direct the conversation to an ally by asking what she or he thinks.

Turn Newcomers into New Members

You shouldn't judge a book by its cover, but what else can you do? There's no time to read a chapter from every book in the bookstore. So first impressions matter. Newcomers to your group will only give you a few moments of their attention, so what they see should be a priority for you to improve.

Pretend you are a curious stranger who knows nothing about secularism or your group. Then look at:

- Whether your website makes sense to non-members, conveying a friendly, professional look
- Whether your Facebook and Twitter pages look active and interesting, or too snarky and full of discordant comments, and whether your Facebook group is set private and cannot be seen at all.
- Whether your event descriptions stand out against other volunteer opportunities
- Whether attending one of your projects makes newcomers feel inspired
- Whether your members sit in silence, talk but ignore newcomers, or welcome them
- What comes up on a Google search for your organization

Ask members for their views on drawing new members. How did they feel upon discovering and then joining? Only the rarest group will find nothing to improve upon. If you need help to make an improvement, call us at the national CAN office. We can help you take your writing and technology setup to the next level.

Of course, you should attend to your current membership as well.

Motivating Your Members

Members are volunteers, so they work for free. However, smart group leaders know that volunteers get "paid" in other ways. Inspire your members by making them stakeholders in your organization and its

projects. Do this by explaining your group's strategy and their role in it. This will make them feel less like cogs in a machine. They'll understand how important what they're doing is to your shared success.

Check in frequently with your volunteers, so that they feel appreciated and attended to. Many of them will hesitate to ask for your help, out of shyness, so encourage them to speak up. Others are so busy that they postpone their tasks, but then feel too guilty to tell you. Resist the urge to judge their organizational failings. Make the issue the bad guy instead of the person the bad guy. Instead of saying, "You promised to send me that list of contacts," say, "Without this list of contacts, we can't start our food drive, and the deadline is coming up quickly. What do you recommend?" That attitude transforms your conversation into a problem-solving dialogue and is less likely to make your wayward volunteer defensive, a digression from solving the problem. Tell failing team members it's okay to drop the task, should they want to. Pressuring someone to step up their game may work in the short term, during an emergency when you have no time to replace someone, but creates burn out as a long-term motivational strategy.

Take every opportunity to reward your volunteers with group recognition, free food, and little gifts such as a discount coupon that a local business might donate. That reduces burnout. Celebrate the life events, such as birthdays and promotions, of the members who would not find that to be a personal intrusion. Look for common areas of interest to bond over, such as shared hobbies, experiences, and vacation destinations, or local friends and businesses you have in common. "Tamara tells me that you've been SCUBA diving. Me, too!"

Your Mood Becomes Their Mood

As the leader of your organization, you have more influence than you might think about your member's moods and the group's culture. If you keep your cool under pressure, your members will as well. If you bark at people when you feel stress, your members will feel stress, which might cause them to drop tasks or quit.

So think about what your group's social tone should be and work explicitly to guide your members in that direction. Ask them not to dominate conversations, so that shy people can speak. Ask them to welcome new members instead of forming cliques. Look ahead to where potential troublemakers are going and take them aside privately, before real trouble begins. Educate your members to be on their best behavior and have a good attitude when joining other community groups at shared initiatives, the better to build good will. The last thing you need is to have a relationship that's going well get shot down by a rude errant comment from a single person on your team to a community leader.

There's no secret to management except to pay attention and be willing to take decisive action so that issues don't fester. It's easy to fix something that is so clearly broken, at an "F" level, that it demands attention. Good managers have the courage to shake things up when needed to fix C-level and B-level problems, so that the whole team performs with an "A".

Meetings: They're Not What You Think

Why do organizations hold boring meetings? Perhaps they know no other way to do it. Boring meetings drain enthusiasm from your members and distract you from getting real work done. Think outside the box. Don't give into the humdrum tradition that a meeting must involve:

- Holding meetings on a set schedule completely out of touch with how busy or lax things are
- An long opening speech from the President, thanking people who are not present
- Reading the minutes of the last meeting
- Reviewing the agenda verbally before starting

- Asking each officer to give a report, and then discussing details that no one else is involved with
- Encouraging everyone to ask every question they can think of on every topic
- Frequent digressions into social topics
- Recapping the discussion for latecomers
- Habitually starting so late or running such lax meetings that members frequently entering and leaving the room become a distraction
- Holding meetings in place that's noisy or has visual distractions like a big window with pedestrians walking by
- Holding meetings in a place like a sit down restaurant where you can't be properly heard by the entire group, and members sit in small groups instead of one big group.
- Asking members to bring up any topic they want to discuss, big or small
- Long presentations by ill prepared speakers with illegible slides

What are we, robots? Shed your assumptions about what meetings have to be. In the technology era, don't use meetings to summarize progress that could be sent in an email. There are only two reasons for a group to meet in person:

- Social bonding, including celebrating individual and team successes
- Making decisions that genuinely require the entire group to brainstorm or buy in

Smart managers use these best practices to organize meetings:

- **Meet only when you need to.** Give up a set meeting schedule. Meet when it is convenient for you to bond socially, which could be at a regular time, but it could also be just when decisions need to be made by the entire group. In between meetings, stay in touch by email and Facebook.
- **Shed topics that don't require the whole group.** It's lazy management to make the entire team sit there while you and one other person discuss the details that nobody else cares about or is involved with. Meet with or call team leaders individually on these issues, and then report by email to the entire group. One-on-one meetings are far more efficient, and they build friendship and good will with team individuals far better than large meetings.
- **Email an agenda in advance.** The purpose of an agenda is not to transform your meeting into an overly rigid discussion. It motivates your attendees to do their homework, so that they are prepared to launch right into, and right out of decision-making. Have an agenda, but then use it as a checklist, rather than a road map for your meeting.
- **Set a culture of efficiency.** Start each meeting with social time to buffer those who arrive late, but then privately ask members not to. Create an artificial end time for your meeting, such as twenty minutes. You may be surprised how an hour's worth of discussion suddenly fits into twenty minutes when you set expectations. It's a way to cue people to bring up major topics, let the minor ones go, and to keep their comments focused so that they don't waste time. Explain that you're not trying to shut down people's opinions, but that you're trying to make meeting more fun and effective for everyone by training your members how to work a meeting efficiently. Yes, that will occasionally mean telling someone, "Can we take that topic offline?" or "Can you discuss that directly with Randy after the meeting?"
- **Stay on topic.** As your group's leader, you aren't a dictator, but neither are you powerless to stop your meetings veering onto long stories about someone taking his cat to the vet. Socialize at the start of your meeting, then explicitly change the tone to get work done, and then announce the meeting is over so your group can socialize again. You should also privately discourage members

who continually raise their hand to ask off-topic questions or bring up matters that could be handled outside the meeting.

- **Head off troublemakers.** It's unpleasant to have to wrestle with a difficult individual or even eject them from the group, but as the leader of your organization, don't let a troublemaker drain your group of energy. Trouble comes when someone makes rude comments, interrupts others, or otherwise emotionally dominates a live meeting or an online forum. Waiting does not magically resolve these situations. You must be decisive. When you have time, take the troublemaker aside and allow them to save face. When you must act immediately, use humor to defuse a real-time situation, because shaming someone can trigger an angry and defensive overreaction. Take encouragement from the likelihood that everyone else in the room is on your side. No one likes a loudmouth or a jackass. (And if you have a clique of self-supporting jackasses in your group, you have failed to manage your group's culture and need to get them all out of there.)
- **Have someone note all the promises.** You don't need meeting minutes. Who ever reads those? You're just wasting your time and playing to the egos of the people who want a written record that they contributed to the conversation. However, someone should make a note of the group's decisions and team members' promises. Don't assume your members are organized enough to remember the tasks they have agreed to do. Everyone should get reminders about everything.

Delegation

If you're like most group leaders, you have an inner fire to make the world a better place. You feel protective of your group and its members, like you're a momma bird and they're the chicks. It's easy to have such a big heart that you do too much. That leads to stress and burnout. Some simple tricks, if you have the discipline to implement them, will help you delegate.

- **Give yourself permission to scale down.** Remember the recommendation that you do one thing, but do it very well? You will have a much higher impact with a limited number of "A" level accomplishments rather than rushing through too many things at a "B" level. Get a hold of your perfectionism and give yourself the permission to say, "Maybe we just won't have a newsletter," or, "Let's only join two community initiatives this Spring, and not run any of our own."
- **Use success to draw resources.** It's frustrating to have limited resources, but you don't have to respond with superhuman overinvestment. Instead, bootstrap your way to more volunteers, more partners, and more funding. Bootstrapping is the process of proving your organization's merit at a small level, which draws you attention and resources, so that you can grow to the next level. So stay at a small level, do it well, and *focus everything you do so that it brings you more resources.*
- **Don't let friends take advantage of you.** Giving much of yourself to others is commendable and generous. Unfortunately, overgiving can send social signals. You can accidentally communicate "I'm not worthy" when you pamper someone who isn't pulling their weight. People love to feel a bit superior. Feeling that we deserve what we are given is an involuntary and unconscious conclusion that we can't stop. Rather than responding with gratitude and a promise to work harder in the future, those we give to can sometimes accept your overgiving as the new normal and work less hard! The best way to get on top of this destructive cycle is to set expectations.
- **Set expectations that work.** You've heard the phrase "set expectations" so often that it seems an easy and obvious part of management. The secret you don't know is that when you set expectations with a team member, he or she has no idea what you're talking about. You walk

away from the conversation thinking that you've set specific goals, a clear deadline, and fully trained your volunteer to take the job and run with it. Most of the time, you haven't. It takes patience and overcommunication to set expectations that work. A good way to tell if you are communicating is to ask for a reflection. At each stage of your conversation, ask the person you are speaking with to tell you in his or her own words what you've just said. You might find some surprising interpretations. Figure it out, and then write it all down in an email for extra clarity.

- **Trust but verify.** Choose good people to delegate to, and invest time educating them. That's easier than watching your projects fail. Trust your team members and give them the space to flourish. If you micromanage them instead, it destroys morale, because it comes with the implied judgment that they might be incompetent. Once you've offered some trust, however, follow up to verify that team tasks are on track. Train volunteers to "handhold" you by sending you frequent updates, rather than making you ask, which can be perceived as intrusive. When you do check in, keep your tone of voice supportive, and when you must make a correction, express confidence that the person being corrected can do the job well, if you can do so sincerely. You'll have to get used to the idea that not everyone will do a task as well as you could, or in the style that you would. Don't lean too heavily. Most of the time, good enough is good enough.
- **Read between the lines.** Team members you delegate to will sometimes not tell you everything about how they are feeling. Sometimes they will accept tasks they feel they can't say no to, but then feel trapped and either do sloppy work or work grudgingly. Some team members will accept tasks with a good will, but don't have the organizational skills, stability in their personal lives, or the time to follow through. Stay on top of these issues and encourage openness with warmth. Be a mentor and friend as well as a leader.
- **Share the glory.** You'll have more motivated and active team members if you celebrate their successes. Be inclusive by using "we" and "us" instead of "I" and "me". Brag about your overperforming team members to your partners in their presence. They'll be embarrassed but love it.

Engaging with the Community Beyond Your Own School

Whom to Partner With

At the heart of the CAN philosophy is the unfortunate truth that most secular groups are inwards focused. That serves an important purpose, creating a safe zone for secular people, but local CAN groups are outwards focused. We engage with our communities, doing good, building good will, and getting them to see who secular people really are. So CAN groups must be expert partnership builders.

We'll partner with any group, even if they oppose all of our secular goals, as long as they include us into their initiatives with respect, and their local project is worthy of our attention. Reach out especially to local organizations that have the power to draw your CAN group into an inspiring, high impact community initiative where you can make a difference, be seen to make a difference, and build good will with community groups that have the power to knight us as "insiders" in mainstream neighborhood initiatives.

You may wish to reach out to:

- Local government:
 - Mayor's office
 - Arts council
 - Community affairs or ombudsman's office
 - Emergency management
 - Fire and police services
 - Historic preservation society
 - Parks and Recreation
 - Urban development and city planning
 - Visitors Bureau or Tourism office
- Adult education
- Advocacy groups
- Athletics
- Chambers of commerce
- Churches, mosques, and synagogues
- Grade schools, high schools, and local colleges
- Hobby clubs
- Non-profit hospitals
- Kids' clubs and non-profit summer camps
- Libraries
- Medical research and other cause-related charities
- Minority groups, women's' groups, and disabled groups
- Museums and zoos
- Parent-Teacher organizations in other schools
- Science, skeptic, and secular groups
- Student clubs, school arts and athletics, and afterschool programs
- Support groups for substance abuse and chronic illness
- Volunteer and service groups
- Community-minded businesses that sponsor local sports teams and projects
- Local chapters of national groups such as the Salvation Army and YMCA
- Local chapters of national secular groups
- Any charity whose programs are notable enough to be found in the local newspaper

Making First Contact

You've noticed that Community Action Network does not have the word "secular" in its title. We don't hide who we are, but we take a softer approach, putting community projects first, and avoiding any hint that we proselytize. So when you reach out to community partners, there's no need to explain secularism or nonbelief. That can come later as we get to know each other. Just offer your assistance, or invite them to join an initiative that you are running.

On the potential partner's website, you should find the names of its leaders, their email addresses, and at least one phone number for the organization's main office. Or you can discover this information through website searches. An organization whose leaders are obscured and impossible to contact is generally not professional enough to be at the top of your contact list. Or the group may be defunct.

When you offer to join someone else's project, only they can really tell you what needs they have, but often they are not prepared to have that conversation. So it helps if you research in advance whatever details of their initiatives you can find, and give some thought to the way that your CAN group might like to help. Ideas include:

- Taking over an entire project that has lost its volunteers or otherwise run out of energy
- Replicating a successful project in a new location or on behalf of a different needy group
- Joining a community meeting to discuss a local issue
- Making a formal presentation at a community meeting to propose a solution to an issue
- Just showing up at a homeless shelter or charity walk and being told what to do on the spot
- Advertising through flyers, posters, and free and paid event websites
- Targeted messaging to social media and email lists
- Attracting new volunteers and partner groups
- Attracting sponsors for funding or project materials such as wood for a new playground
- Liaising with government for permissions, safety, and oversight
- Liaising with media to get them to cover the project or write about its success afterwards
- Negotiating solutions in one-on-one sessions with community stakeholders that are in conflict
- Building a 5-year plan to extend current projects into the future
- Studying similar initiatives elsewhere in the country for lessons learned and best practices
- Running the volunteer orientation booth and managing volunteers on Project Day
- Taking responsibility for a component of a project, organizing for example:
 - Entertainment
 - Food
 - Logistics
 - Photography / Videography
 - Supplies
 - Transportation

The Single Most Powerful Use of Three Minutes of Your Time

Sending someone a thank you card is a dramatically powerful personal touch. It may be the single most powerful use of three minutes of your time. It's classy, makes you stand out from others, and is almost guaranteed to be repaid with good will. Buy blank thank you cards in bulk and make it a habit to send one to community stakeholders after every first meeting and every important meeting. We'll know you're an overachiever if you send one to us at national CAN after the first time we speak!

Discrimination

Be prepared for discrimination. You may be told that secular groups will not be allowed to participate. Private organizations can do as they like, and this may be legal. However, most local government initiatives cannot legally exclude you. Battling your way through a closed front door is not the CAN approach to building deep, personal relationships with community leaders, and should be a last option.

You may need to negotiate tricky details, such as a guarantee on how many CAN volunteers will attend, limits on what parts of the initiative you may influence, and whether your group can wear unobtrusive Community Action Network t-shirts at a volunteer event or must remain even lower under the radar.

When you encounter discrimination, remember that attacks on religion have contributed to the stereotype of the bitter atheist who condescends. Try to laugh it off and just be yourself. It's hard for them to hate you unless they can trigger you into causing a scene. Take secret pleasure in not being baited into anger and stay positive and friendly. Don't give in to a victim mentality. Communities vary, but you will almost always find individuals who secretly empathize with you, even if they don't have the courage to speak up on your behalf. These people may privately help with your access or advise you on what to do.

Reduce potential conflict by sticking to safe topics when dealing with people from new organizations. After all, we're trying to get them to see us as people, and as people we are far more than secularists. Find common ground by asking good questions and telling others about your hobbies, your background, and your favorite local restaurants and other destinations. Let your nonbelief in God and the goals of the secular movement come up naturally over time.

Your members may complain that they don't like to volunteer on projects where individuals or entire groups act passive-aggressive or openly harass them. It's your job as the group leader to make respect a requirement for any project you contribute to. Tell your members that to end discrimination, secular people need to engage their community and let them get to know us. Take it in measured steps. Stand up for respect and don't run from a bit of discrimination, but don't be so quick to play the victim card that magnifies something that is clearly trivial and end up annoying those with the power to help you.

You can also go elsewhere when you find discrimination. When you join a gym, you can't build muscles with 2-pound weights, and you can't build muscles with 500-pound weights. Find groups to work with where the heat is not too hot, and you find that you are getting some traction. That progress will start to add up and give you the influence to deal with the more antagonist groups later. Prove yourself on the projects that *will* accept your help, and then use your new reputation and allies to gain entry to others.

Your Online Presence

Obviously, if you can afford to build it, you'll want to have a website. However, an amateur website is worse than none at all. If you can't do it well, then just use a Facebook page for your group. Spend some time adding high quality photos and describe your group clearly for outsiders.

Don't be hesitant to name your group leaders and list their email addresses. You're already getting so much spam that you couldn't possibly get any more by revealing your email address in this one new location. And this makes it so much easier to contact you. Websites with contact forms and generic email address such as "info@secularpeeps.org" make visitors feel unwelcome. Put personalities onto your website with names, headshots, contact emails, and even biographies.

There's no point to having social media pages if you're going to neglect them and make visitors wonder if you've gone inactive. Post something at least once a week to keep them fresh, or don't have them at all.

Advertising

The Secret to a Great Ad Campaign

CAN groups do not place advertisements that proselytize or attack religion, but you may need to advertise to draw new members and promote project events. You may help with the advertising for the community initiatives that you join. There are many ways to get attention, but the heart of effective advertising is a *targeted message to a targeted audience*. You can spend all day putting flyers on car windshields only to annoy people, reach people who care nothing about community projects, and fail to connect with those who don't understand what you've written. Or you can take a smarter approach and write directly to those most likely to say yes. That's the power of targeting.

Cross-Promotion

By far the most effective way to spread your message is by word of mouth, and cross-promotion is like a super word of mouth, because you work through local bloggers, social media pages, and community groups who have really big mouths and whose readers trust their recommendations. Spend a few hours making a big list of local stakeholders who have a large number of followers on social media or email, but who also care about neighborhood initiatives or support secular values, and thus are likely to agree to help you. Some of these leaders will already be on your list of potential partners, but others will simply be bloggers or individuals running a social media page with no organization behind them.

Form a relationship with them just as you've been doing with community stakeholder groups. Ask them to forward your messages to their followers, but also offer to help them as well. For example, you can forward their needs to your own community group. Or you might forward them news articles they can utilize on their blog, especially scoops they haven't seen yet and overlooked field news stories they wouldn't otherwise have come across. Bloggers are always looking for crisp photographs and story ideas, so give them yours. You might offer to connect them to local stakeholders in your network. Or you might just take part in the commenting community for their Twitter feed or Facebook page, building a friendship that need not be a direct exchange of favors.

You'll also find community calendars, such as Craigslist, that let you post project events for free or at a low cost. Make sure to use a good photograph and write an intriguing headline.

Facebook Ads

What if you could target just local people who believe in community or volunteering, in a way that makes it easy for them to respond, with a single click? That's what a Facebook advertisement is. You can learn more at www.facebook.com/advertising and look on YouTube for easy video tutorials.

Facebook allows you to target your audience by gender, age, location, keywords on their page, group membership and much more. You can also run two ads simultaneously, see which ones get clicked, and dump those that don't. That leads to a positive spiral where your ads get more and more effective.

The secret to Facebook ads is that people don't just come to social media to read. They come to express themselves. An advertisement that matches their mood or invites them to participate will work better than a message that just states the nature of your project. For example, "I'll paint the swing set!" with a photo that is clearly some neighborhood volunteers building a playground will work better than "Help us build a playground for local kids". Use a clear, professional photo that communicates the emotion of your project in a glimpse and doesn't make your group look like amateurs who can't manage even one good photo.

Effective Advertising

A common mistake that inexperienced artists make is to cram their canvases. A densely packed painting may seem to have energy, but it confuses the viewer. There's no natural path for the eye to follow. It's hard to get a "big picture" sense of what's going on. Professional artists know the value of white space.



This work of art is too crowded. Nothing pops out from just a glimpse. There's no reason to look closer.



White space helps the viewer focus on the important elements, the two figures.

Advertisements work the same way. Before viewers read your message, they glimpse at it and decide whether their eye will linger. That decision happens in a fraction of a second, and there's nothing to glimpse if your ad is too cluttered.



This ad is too cluttered. It says so much that your eye doesn't know where to go, and it's almost impossible to read in detail, if you cared to, which you don't.



This ad is brief, has plenty of white space, and your eye goes right to the headline first. With just a glance you "get it".

Resist the temptation to put every detail of your message into your flyers and social media ads. All you need is a hook that intrigues people into clicking. Think of your advertisement as a promise. The promise is, "If you click this, you'll find something good." So an advertisement that says, "Got Soup? The People in These Pics Don't." might intrigue viewers more than, "Rally Tuesday November 11 at Joe's Diner to Serve Soup to the Homeless". The details of where and when can be given after the visitor clicks the ad. For online advertisements, the hook is all you need.

Flyers

Flyers serve no purpose in the Internet era unless you can distribute them efficiently. Don't leave flyers on car windshields. Don't place them generically around town. Become acquainted with your local laws. Most towns won't allow you to hang flyers on telephone poles and buildings. It's a form of littering, and such undirected advertising is a waste of your time anyhow.

Instead, find community bulletin boards. Coffee shops, bars, record stores, and restaurants will often have a bulletin board or allow you to tape a poster in their front window. They're not hard to find. Go to your town's main center and walk around looking for posters in windows.

Most schools have strict rules about posters, because taped up posters damage the paint on walls. Look for official school poster boards and hang your advertisements there only. At some schools, you may need your local CAN group to be an official student group, or to affiliate with a student group, to have permission to hang posters. Don't break the rules. The school can't really punish you, but CAN groups build community good will. We don't fight with school administrations. Despite our high energy, advertising so heavily that it becomes an eyesore just isn't worth the incremental attention those ads might fetch. For example, don't hang two posters on every corkboard, even if others are doing so. If you feel you must compete, design two different flyers that have different sizes, design styles, and messages. That will annoy people less.



Pull tabs on a flyer

What's the most important trick to advertising? *Targeting*. So our favorite way to distribute flyers is directly to targeted groups. Leave a stack of flyers at the entrance to a college class or lecture on a topic that resonates with community service or secular values. Bring some to the school office of student clubs that care about the community. Still, emails will work better.

Use pull tabs on your flyers. They help viewers remember to call you or visit your website. They also help you see whether your flyers are working. The ones missing pull tabs are getting results.

Unfortunately, secular groups often face vandalism in their flyers. Also, most schools get such heavy levels of flyers that janitorial staff regularly clear community boards. Return frequently, during a morning, to replenish your flyers. Targeting the best trafficked spots more often is a far better investment than papering every corner of campus only once.

Tabling and other Forms of Advertising

Some schools will allow you to write messages in chalk on cement walkways around campus. You may be allowed to leave flyers at tables in your cafeteria. Student newspapers and local community newspapers will often place charitable ads at low or no cost, when they have blank space to fill. Convince local newspapers to write about your upcoming project, which if you have crafted carefully should be newsworthy. That's free advertising!

Or you can set up a table in your student center, or at a local community festival, to greet passersby, engage them in conversation, and hand out literature. Local libraries, museums, sporting events, and community pools may also allow you to set up a table. You can get a banner made at your local copy shop, and don't forget to leave plenty of whitespace and leave out the details. That banner has to intrigue people with just a glimpse, and at a distance.



It's easy when working a table to get distracted or bored. Pedestrians will walk right by you when that happens. Stay vigilant. Make eye contact, smile, and say hello to passersby. Experiment with phrases that get their attention. You don't need to hand out candy or pens. Focus instead on the substance of what you are offering. You might say for example, "We're building a new playground for the Stover School. Can I tell you more?" Or try just, "Are you any good with a hammer?" This question, from out of the blue, without any context, may just intrigue someone to stop walking, especially if they really are good

at building things. As with all forms of advertising, first you hook them with an intriguing question or statement. Leave the details until later when you have their attention.

Printing up literature to hand out is expensive, especially in color, which is the only way to convey professionalism, and practically valueless. Even well-meaning people who intend to follow up with you will lose or forget about your handouts. When people visit your booth, skip the handouts and politely insist on getting their name and email. You can sweeten the pot by offering them an incentive. For example, you might say, “Can I send you the list of participating organizations?” or “The Stover School has some really cute kids in their photos. Can I send you an email link?” People are guarded with their contact information. Tell them that their emails will be kept private, that they will only hear from you occasionally, that they can opt out anytime, and that what you send them, for example a monthly newsletter plus event announcements, will be substantive and genuinely interesting.

People don’t really hate getting email. They hate getting boring, off-topic, irrelevant email. So promise them that your messages will be short, interesting, and on topic, and then ensure it is so.

You guessed it. Our favorite way to table is *targeted*. Targeting is key to ads that work. Choose events that have high traffic and are likely to bring you into contact with people who will care about what you are doing. Or skip the table and get permission to speak for 30 seconds in front of a professor’s classroom, a student club meeting, a sports or arts event, or a community meeting, and then ask the audience to pass around a clipboard for email signups.

The Secret to Raising Money

The worst way to raise money is the way that practically all groups do it. They require their members to pay dues, which drains morale, and anyway membership dues never amounted to serious money. They burden each newsletter with a request for donations, which becomes tiresome, and make passive-aggressive threats about going bankrupt. Meanwhile you never seem to have enough funds.

Raising money is actually straightforward once you know the secret. Donors give money to do good in the community. Sponsors give money to get noticed. So give them what they want, instead of saying, lamely and vaguely, “Hey, give us your money.” You will of course need your group to have formal non-profit status to draw large donations, because donors will want them to be tax deductible. Small donors and sponsors sometimes won’t care.

To draw donors, inspire them with a well thought out plan for how you will spend their money. This will take a lot of effort, but if your project gets funding you will need a detailed plan anyhow. And detailed plans succeed more often than winging it. So don’t fight it: invest heavily in a powerful and detailed plan which shows that you’ve done your homework. Build a logical and emotional argument, as though you are writing a TV commercial. Showcase the community projects that your group is involved with. Make the donation seem special and urgent by showing how one gift right now can unlock the potential of a neighborhood initiative with a deadline. Forecast the impact the project will have on the happiness of specific groups of people in the community.

Because not everyone is inspired by the same thing, offer a diversity of project ideas, “cafeteria style”, so that donors and volunteers can pick and choose. Look at the Gates Foundation website for example project write-ups.



*In my detailed plan,
the blue boxes get bigger!*

How do you find donors? It just takes some research. Organizations and individuals who give are constantly being mentioned in the news. What about donors who give anonymously or privately, with no media attention? Look at the boards of local community groups. When donors give money, they want to ensure that it’s spent wisely, so they often ask for seats on a board. You may have to search the Web or network in the community to get a phone number or an email address. Then you’ll need to be persistent, and put plenty of “wow” into your communications, to get their attention. Keep at it. Organizations that regularly give to the community are looking for opportunities to make a big impact, inexpensively, through a team they trust whose plan seems well grounded. Donors are not as hard to chase as you think.

Don’t be too mercantile in your approach to donors. Donors are often retired and looking for something to do: a group to mentor, or a cause to feel involved in. You can learn a lot from them and benefit from their connections, so invest in a relationship, even if they choose not to give. They may still donate, but want to get to know you for a few months and see whether your current plans become reality before funding a future plan. But don’t wait for them to offer. Occasionally, you have to ask.

You can also apply for grants from large foundations, although the process can be demoralizing, with long forms and a longer wait to hear back. You’ll find large lists of grants on the Internet, and the key is to apply to the ones most likely to say yes, based on their having funded similar organizations to yours. Your best chance of landing a grant is to attend a foundation event, or call up a foundation staffer, pitch your idea verbally, and learn whether they encourage you or discourage you to apply. Then, without applying inappropriate pressure, ask them to shepherd your application through the process so that you can respond to feedback and make modifications for the best chance of success.

How National CAN Helps

Reading through this booklet, you might be thinking, “Wow. Starting a secular group has a lot of potential, but it’s also going to be a lot of work. Why do I need to join CAN to get any of this done? How real is the national office’s offer to help?”

Call us and find out. That’s the easiest way for us to get to know you and your needs. Or send an email to Edwina Rogers at edwina@secularpolicyinstitute.net.

Community Action Network is the premier project of an influential organization, the Secular Policy Institute, the world’s largest secular think tank and the world’s largest coalition of secular groups. We are staffed by professional managers with deep understanding of the little known secrets to non-profit management, outreach, and community organizing. Outside of CAN, but complementary to our grassroots CAN efforts, we lobby governments worldwide towards secular values, sponsor secular projects, write public policy recommendations, research the demographics of secular people, and study the effectiveness of laws that support or limit secular values. We run the World Future Forum, an annual conference that draws dozens of members of Congress and hundreds of leading thinkers and decision-makers in science, skeptic, and secular advocacy.

We help local CAN groups because we want to make a difference in the world, but if you want to know whether we get enormous benefit from helping you, we do. [Community Action Network](#) functions like the [Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation](#), which you may have heard doesn’t just fund projects. They talent scout the best ideas and then use their experience to accelerate them to the next level, connecting them to funding, helping secure the success of the project, and then promoting successes to the media.

CAN is nothing without high impact local projects to showcase our success to donors. **We need you.** You have the ideas, the people, and the local savvy to **help you**. Let us contribute. We can:

- Help you set up your group, including filing for non-profit status,
- Work with you on your website, materials, and social media feeds,
- Give you feedback on your project plans and get them shaped up for funding,
- Help you find attention from donors, volunteers, stakeholders, and the media,
- Train you on organizational and communications skills,
- Work through with you the specific, day-to-day issues that your group is facing,
- Connect you to our extensive list of contacts in cities and at the state level across the country,
- Help you form partnerships with stakeholder groups and other secular groups,
- Champion your successes to the media,
- And much more.

We do it all with strong resources that we build at the national level, which we distribute and adapt to the needs of local groups on the ground like yours.

Don’t reinvent the wheel. Let us help you get going with bang. The secular movement is ready to spring into mainstream consciousness. We are ready to end discrimination and make a normalized place for secular people in society. Work with us. **Together we CAN.**