

# In the First Year: Advice on Starting A Ukrainian Students' Organization

---

Published online by the Ukrainian Canadian Students' Union (SUSK) at [www.susk.ca](http://www.susk.ca)  
Adapted from the SUSK Guidebook by A Wodoslawsky  
November 2009

---

## ***Purpose of this Document***

The objective of this document is to give some guidelines as to how to start or revive a student organization. For additional help, approach your local SUSK representative, and visit [www.susk.ca](http://www.susk.ca) for access to more resources.

## **Table of Contents**

Purpose of this Document.....	1
Forming your Team.....	2
First Couple of Executive meetings .....	2
Official Status at your University .....	3
September .....	3
More On Attracting Members .....	4
Communicating with your Members.....	4
Office and Storage.....	5
The Basics of Budgeting for Events.....	5
Scheduling.....	6
Using the Internet .....	7
Letting the world know you exist .....	7
Conclusion.....	7

## **Forming your Team**

The first thing you need is to assemble your executive. Some essential roles are:

1. President. Charasmatic, good negotiator, energetic and very motivated. The diplomat and general.
2. Finance director. Responsible, methodical, trustable. You want someone who is ready to question the need for this-and-that, and that will keep track of expenditures and budgets and take the initiative to report mistakes or over-spending.
3. Communications / technical director. If you want to have a web site, you need someone with technical competence, and the inclination to take initiative to continuously update. This person might also consider preparing a regular newsletter.
4. Project/event directors. Each in charge of managing a project or event, from planning to post-execution (i.e. cleanup, thanking sponsors, completion of financial activities for event). They should be mini-presidents, able to build and lead their own event committees, solve problems, and get things done.

Your executive should meet several times during the summer, before the school year starts, so that in September your workload is smaller, and you already know what your goals and ideas are for the year.

If you are starting or reviving a club, it is a huge benefit to your to get in contact with your local Ukrainian Canadian Students' Union (SUSK) representative. SUSK can connect you immediately to national and regional networks of information, send you the SUSK newsmag periodically, help you market your organization, help you with preparing a start-up grant application from SUSK, point you to potential sponsors in the area, and much more!

## **First Couple of Executive meetings**

This is the time when the executive should split up the workload and try to plan out the year. It may be difficult to imagine if you have never done this before, but it helps a great deal. If you set up a "skeleton calendar of events" for your USO, you can help set your goals, you can spread your work over the whole year, and you can pace yourself rather than burning out early (for the ambitious ones).

The dates on this plan do not have to be firm - leave room for flexibility. Also, a plan such as this will give you plenty of time to book rooms, auditoriums or equipment well in advance, when the selection is still good (and other clubs/organizations are not using them). You should also go through the individual responsibilities of the executive members, and decide who is to have done what by the beginning of the year, e.g. the treasurer must set up a bank account (or locate the old one), prepare a budget, etc.

*Table 1: Example skeleton plan for next year, done in late August*

<b>Month</b>	<b>Event Description</b>	<b>Responsible</b>	<b>Helpers</b>
September	Club's day booth	Maksym	Mirka, Olenka
September	General meeting	Christina	Olenka, Andrij

<b>Month</b>	<b>Event Description</b>	<b>Responsible</b>	<b>Helpers</b>
October	Pyrohy night	Kassandra	Maksym (marketing only)
November	Holodomor holodivka	Kalyna	Roman, Olenka, Kateryna
November	post-midterms movie night at Maksym's house on campus	Maksym	Catherine
December	Christmas Dinner – member's only!	Olenka	Mirka, TBA
January	Koliada!	Volodymyr	TBA
February	General meeting	TBA	TBA
February	Club delegation to SUSK Congress!!!(registration starts in December)	Christina	Olenka, Kassandra
Feburary	Sports tournament	Orest	TBA
April	Year-end event	TBA	TBA

### ***Official Status at your University***

It is a very good idea to register your USO officially at the university. There are some formalities and paper work that have to be done for this, which usually requires some minimum number of signed members (ex. ~15 at U of Ottawa). Usually, you are then eligible for some sort of financial support from the university or the student administrative council. Also, you will be listed in the official university list of recognized student organizations (they must have one somewhere).

Many universities require you to submit the organization's constitution. A sample constitution is available on [www.susk.ca/resources](http://www.susk.ca/resources).

### ***September***

By this time you should know your club's general direction. September is the time when your membership drive begins. You should have a registration sheet that is relatively simple to fill out, and easy to understand. Make sure you get all personal information, so that you can locate these people to help for events.

When a person registers in your club, you should give them some sort of membership package. Offer them incentives for joining. Some things that have been done in the past are:

1. a free t-shirt with the club logo somewhere on it,
2. discounts at various establishments and businesses in the area with membership
3. lower ticket prices at pubs and zabavas
4. free pizza and drinks at general meetings.

Sometimes this package ends up costing a little more than the membership fee itself, but it's worth it for the club. To kick off the membership drive, you should hold an event that will attract the youth in your city (like a "pub night" or "social").

Usually most universities have carnivals or club recruitment days on campus where you can set up a table to advertise your club and get members. Attending is very important since you can't know all the Ukrainians on campus: there will be many that will come "out of the woodwork". But be prepared: have some sort of literature about your membership package, and have gifts like pens, temporary tatoos, or henna to leave a good impression.

### ***More On Attracting Members***

You have to provide your members with something they can't get with other clubs or organization. Although we may feel that Ukrainian students should get involved or at least join the USO at your university just because they are Ukrainian and should care about having "a good Ukie club", this is hardly realistic. At the bare minimum your executive has to outline a plan of events and activities that will give people a reason for joining. If your USO has no program outlined at the beginning of the year, even the most die-hard of Ukes won't want to get involved.

Look for discounts. Some stores (Ukrainian and non-Ukrainian) are willing to offer a 5%-25% discount to your members. Some will do it because they want to help out your organization, and others need to be sold on it (e.g. "you will have 50 more people coming to your store for a mere 15% discount").

Offer events that can benefit their careers. A career night where they get a chance to listen to and meet people who work in the profession they would like to become involved in. This can be organized with the help of the UCPBA in your city.

Give member s free t-shirt. A T-shirt with your USO logo is both a good way of advertising your organization and it attracts members. You can use the membership fee to help pay for this shirt. When you buy in bulk or even get it donated, the t-shirt with printing can cost as little as \$6-\$8. Approach you local beer company representative and tell them you will use their brand exclusively at your social events if he will donate shirts or at least give you a drastic discount.

Now put this all into a membership package, combine it with a good social event, and you should have have line-ups at your registration table. Be sure when collecting memberships, that your members **pay their fee up front**.

### ***Communicating with your Members***

An efficient and cheap way of communication with your members is via an email newsletter. Distill everything you want to say in a short and concise newletter. Don't overwhelm the reader, and don't give into the temptation to spam between newsletters – it will put people off.

A good format to consider:

Dear Member,

This October is a very exciting month for the Ukrainian Students' Club at Nippissing!

-The Executive

\*\*\*\*\*

- 1. Bowling Night**
- 2. Career night with the Professional Business Association**
- 3. Halloween Zabava**

\*\*\*\*\*

**1. Bowling Night**

On Friday October 5, at 7pm, the club is meeting at Bowlerama at 160 King Street. Paid members get to play their first round for half-price.

\*\*\*\*\*

**2. Career night with the Professional Business Association**

On Wednesday October 10, at 7:30pm, USC and the UCPBA are teaming up to hold the second annual career night. We'll have an amazing panel of professional from all sorts careers! Artists, spies, white-color investigators, and much more! Admission free for members, \$5 for others. refreshments included.

\*\*\*\*\*

**3. Halloween Zabava**

Come and celebrate Halloween at the biggest event in Nippissing! Live band. Prizes for best costumes. Good prices for drinks. \$10 admission, \$8 for paid members. Wrist-band policy in effect.

## ***Office and Storage***

Approach your local Ukrainian institute, student administration or maybe community center and ask about having some sort of space for club "things": decorations, promotional material, etc. This will make your work a lot easier, and will give you a place to hang out between classes.

## ***The Basics of Budgeting for Events***

For any events, make sure to build a budget, both to determine the feasibility of the event, and to control spending during preparation. Estimate costs for the following:

- ✓ band or DJ contract fee
- ✓ facility/hall rental
- ✓ security

- ✓ AV equipment
- ✓ food
- ✓ drinks
- ✓ printing tickets
- ✓ printing posters
- ✓ decorations
- ✓ wrist bands / stamps
- ✓ insurance
- ✓ anticipated cost of damage to venue
- ✓ other

On top of that, make sure to automatically add some sort of contingency amount for emergencies, ("you for got the ...?") either as a lump sum or a percentage of the total budget (ex. 10%). For events that rely on making money from admission, consider using the following formula:

$$(\text{number of people needed to break even}) = (\text{total cost of event}) \times (1.1 \text{ contingency}) / (\text{price of admission})$$

Think realistically about whether or not you can convince that many people to come to the event. If the answer is "no", then consider scaling down to a smaller venue, or dropping the live band in favour of a well-chosen and well-balanced playlist.

For one extra depth of complexity, use the following iterative procedure.

1. "Design" your event: make a wish list of venue and features.
2. Estimate Fixed Costs = costs that don't change with the number of guests i.e. venue, band.
3. Estimate Per-Unit Variable Costs = costs that change with number of people i.e. food, alcohol.
4. Guess how many people would come to this event, based on similar events in the area.
5. Use the following formula to find the attendance break-even point:

$$(\text{number of guests to break-even}) = [ (\text{total fixed costs}) + (\text{variable costs}) \times (\text{guess}) ] \times 1.1$$

If your first guess is very different to the "break even" number, plug the «break-even number as the "guess" and find the new break-even. Repeat until "guess" and «break-even» are very close. Again, the result "break-even" is effectively the minimum numbers of guests that you need to bring in. If that number is too high and not feasible, then the event has to be redesigned.

## **Scheduling**

When planning when and who is doing what, and how much time they will have, keep two things in mind:

1. Whether action items can be done in series (i.e. one has to be finished before the next is started) or in parallel (i.e. they don't rely on each other and can be done at the same time)
2. Events planning always takes longer than you think. Use the "Pi Rule" – multiply your time-estimates by three to get how long an action item will take.

In all, start early, because school might get in the way later.

## ***Using the Internet***

A Facebook group and a club Gmail account are the the absolute minimum. Then ask your student administration whether you can have server space for a website. If there is free server space available form your school, then have your webmaster set up a WYSIWYG website creation framework, like Wordpress.

A website can be more than just for event posting and pictues. For large events requiring advance registration, such as the yearly McMaster Volleyball Tournament and the SUSK National Congress, a Paypoll account can be set up. That way, payment can be done in securely and in advance, but at some cost. Have your webmaster visit [www.paypal.com](http://www.paypal.com) to set up a "merchant account".

You can track visits to your website in detail using Google Analytics <http://www.google.com/analytics/>. You can set up an account for free, and track visits by a very large number of different variables, including geographphy, language, length of time on each page of your site, number of unique visits, and much more! It's all free.

Another useful tool for managing projects is Google Documents. This online system allows you to access a full-capability spreadsheet, word processor or slide-presentation program from anywhere with internet. This is an expecially powerfull tool if you have a number of people that need access to the same document – such as an expenditures form for a large event; each committee member can update the document whenever they need to, without having to wait for it to be emailed to them! The SUSK Congress 2008 in Toronto was organized with the extensive use of Google Documents. Just remember to download a backup copy of the documents from time to time, "just in case".

## ***Letting the world know you exist***

Whatever events you have, whatever you do that you want people to know about, write about it to your local (Ukrainian) newspaper, school newspaper, or even in the mainstream media! As Zorianna Luhovy said at the 51st SUSK National Congress in Montreal: "If it isn't written down, it never happened".

## ***Conclusion***

The fundamental piece of advice for executive members, is to choose projects/events that you will enjoy and be passionate about. After all, if you can't motivate yourself, why should others be excited?

---