

Guidelines for Regional Chapters

SSN regional chapters help members come together to maximize their impact on local, state, and national issues.



The Path to Form New Chapters

Through the following steps, any group of SSN members may propose the formation of a new chapter in a state, region, or metropolitan area.

- Put together a core group of interested SSN members and identify two or three co-leaders.
- Host an “intro to SSN” event over food, possibly paired with an event featuring a visiting SSN leader. Frame the event as a chance to discuss goals for a possible chapter.
- Create a relationship with at least one collaborator outside of academia (policymaker, civic organization, or media outlet).
- Take initial action with the collaborator on a shared project involving existing or potential chapter members outside of the leadership core.
- Recruit and work with the SSN office to fully enroll at least five new members.
- Identify a graduate fellow and assign initial tasks.
- Create a one paragraph description for the SSN site of the chapter’s purpose and initial goals.

Maintaining Thriving Chapters

Established SSN chapters should focus on making a difference by enriching policy debates, recruiting members, and developing leaders. Chapters should take on projects that build relationships between scholars and policymakers, civic leaders, and journalists; and they should give members opportunities to build skills, access national SSN resources, and work together in gratifying and productive ways.

Here are the expectations for established chapters:

- Recruit at least six *new* members each academic year.
- By no later than March 1, identify a graduate fellow for the following academic year.
- Bring policymakers, civic leaders, and journalists together with members to identify important future research questions and possible projects for collaboration.
- Conduct a group project to provide research, scholarly perspectives, or public commentary in answer to a request from a policymaker, civic group, or journalist.
- Hold regular meetings to bring members together.
- Offer opportunities for members to gain skills and take on leadership roles.

Additional Information, Tips, and Best Practices for Chapter Leaders

Develop leaders

Distributing responsibilities and letting members lead projects are good ways for chapter chairs to develop new leaders. Thriving organizations often have active subcommittees.

Make good use of your graduate fellow

Graduate fellows help chapters thrive. Each fellow receives an honorarium of \$500 from national funds, and chapters may choose to provide additional compensation from their own budgets.

Participate in SSN's national retreat

Periodically SSN convenes a National Leadership Retreat at which leaders share best practices, build relationships, and inform national priorities. The national budget covers expenses. Every chapter is expected to send at least one leader to the entire retreat.

Set specific goals

After consulting members, policymakers, and civic leaders, chapter leaders should choose significant, measurable, realistic, time-limited goals (such as introducing five legislative leaders to chapter members during the next four months).

Use funds well

Chapters have annual budgets that they may use to cover event costs, refreshments for group meetings, or stipends for student assistants. Emerging chapters have a budget of \$5,000 for their first academic year (\$2,500 if founded in Spring). Flourishing groups can expect budgets of \$8,000 each year. If an extra-local SSN member is invited to speak at a chapter event, the national office will cover travel expenses apart from the chapter budget. Unspent budgeted funds do not roll over from year to year.

At the end of each year in which a chapter has been fully active and effective, chapter leaders receive honoraria. Co-leaders receive \$3,000 apiece, while triplet chapter heads receive \$2,000 apiece.

Activate chapter members and partners

Events – SSN public events should include policymakers, leaders of civic groups, and journalists. Events that bring academics to state capitals and other civic spaces off campus are particularly powerful. Cosponsors like public radio stations and civic organizations can expand the reach of events. Chapters may want to hold private meetings or dinners as well.

Trainings – Skill-building trainings provide a great way to deliver benefits to local members and recruit new members. SSN staff can help chapters plan and conduct media trainings and policy engagement trainings.

Projects – Many chapters pursue ongoing partnerships with local news outlets or civic groups. Beyond that, asking policymakers or civic leaders to indicate important-but-not-urgent research questions can be a highly effective way to identify new projects. Chapter members can work together to respond to such requests, recruit additional colleagues who can help, and take advantage of additional members and resources in the national network. Addressing specific requests gives current and prospective members good reasons to write two-page briefs that digest research findings and policy ideas into a plain, jargon-free language.