

Adviser Responsibilities

Most educators, at some point in their career, are asked to take on the responsibility of working with a student organization. Few people assume their advising experience with any advance training. Unfortunately, it's usually assumed that educators can step into adviser roles using only the knowledge and experience that prepared them to be teachers. While that knowledge and experience make a good foundation, working with students in an advising capacity requires different skills and attitudes than classroom teaching.

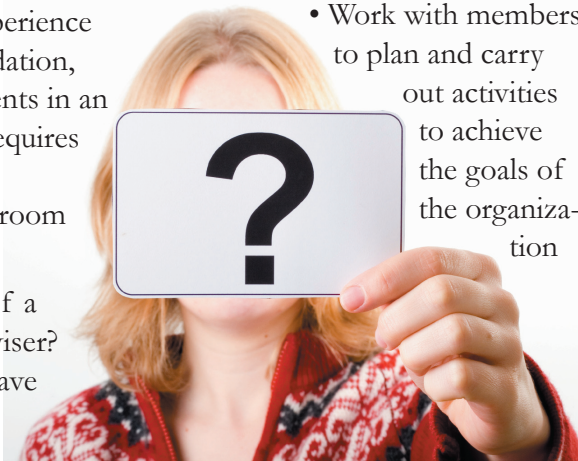
What is expected of a student activity adviser? Each district will have its own expectations—and if you are lucky, these are written in a job description—but in general, the responsibilities of activity advisers can be divided into two areas: program functions and educational functions.

Program Functions

Program functions provide for the smooth operation of the organization. In this area, the activity adviser is expected to:

- Be aware of procedures and regulations affecting the group, including how student activities operate in your district and state
- Be familiar with the constitution and bylaws of the organization with which you work
- Establish yearly goals for the group in accordance with the purpose of the organization
- Work with members to plan and carry out activities to achieve the goals of the organization
- Oversee the work of the organization through the officers and committee chairs
- Assist the group in meeting deadlines and achieving goals
- Attend meetings and planned events of the group
- Hold regular meetings and planning sessions with group officers
- Inform members of resources and opportunities that will

- advance the goals of the organization
- Employ planning, resource management, record keeping, and learning environment management practices to maximize the group's effectiveness
- Serve as a resource on administrative/academic issues and how these relate to the functioning of the group
- Obtain administrative approval for all group-sponsored activities
- Serve as a liaison to the faculty, administration, student body, and community regarding matters related to the organization
- Schedule and supervise fundraising activities
- Administer the receipt and disbursement of organization funds
- Maintain financial records of the group
- Oversee the recruitment or selection of new members
- Oversee the election or selection of officers and committee chairs
- Work with officers to assist them in understanding and carrying out their duties



- Provide for the effective transition of officers from one year to the next
- Develop procedures for keeping records and evaluation files
- Provide supervision to ensure student safety during organization activities
- Act as chaperone to members attending workshops and conferences
- Keep principal and staff apprised of the organization's activities
- Provide information on organization activities to local media to promote positive community relations.

Educational Functions

Because the activity program is an integral part of the school's mission, providing invaluable opportunities for students to expand on and practice what they have learned in the classroom, activity advisers are also expected to make decisions guided by educational goals. In this area, the activity adviser is expected to:

- Express enthusiasm and interest in the group and its activities
- Enlarge the thinking of the group by introducing new ideas and challenging the group on "the way we've always done things"
- Encourage the involvement of all group members

- Conduct leadership training for officers and members
- Work with student members and officers to develop their leadership skills
- Provide support for students to practice their management and leadership skills
- Act as a facilitator of group discussion by summarizing, clarifying, and teaching facilitation skills to members
- Give assistance, guidance, and praise when appropriate
- Act as a positive critic of the group. Give feedback on how they are doing
- Conduct regular evaluations of programs and activities
- Be open minded, looking for new ideas and encouraging the best from students
- Form a positive, role-modeling relationship with the officers and members.

The requirements for activity advisers will vary from district to district, and job descriptions often involve little more than a list of activities for which the person is responsible. Check with your administration to determine if a written description exists for an activity adviser. If not, it's a good idea to draft one so that everyone involved knows what is expected when taking on the responsibility of working with a student organization.

The Adviser's Checklist of Essential Skills

An effective student activity adviser:

- Is familiar with the school philosophy and policies for activities
- Is committed to the concept of student activities and student participation
- Knows the role and responsibilities of an adviser and has a written job description
- Understands the importance of committees and assists in setting up a functioning committee system
- Knows how to help students establish goals and objectives and plan for their effective implementation
- Can work with the students in an orderly process of problem-solving and decision-making
- Is knowledgeable about principles of organizational structure and management
- Is familiar with the skills necessary to conduct meetings and is able to teach the skills to the members of the organization
- Understands the importance of public relations and communication skills and demonstrates them effectively
- Knows the functions of projects/activities and their relationship to the success and image of the organization
- Participates in activities to continually increase knowledge and skills as an adviser
- Exhibits good human relations skills in working with others
- Has an understanding of the teaching-learning process and the necessity of working with the student and not telling them what to do
- Gives credit where credit is due and constantly encourages the students
- Is willing to devote the time required, both in and out of school
- Sets personal goals and evaluates performance in meeting them.

Excerpted from *A Handbook for the Student Activity Adviser* by Ron Joekel. © NASSP, 1989.