



# Making Connections

The FCCLA Guide  
to Preparing  
**Future  
Advisers**

FCCLA and other student activity advisers who stay in the business of advising year after year discover that making connections with others is a key element in their success and longevity as advisers. Developing connections with people and groups gives them a good support network that helps keep up their enthusiasm for the job, gives them lots of new ideas, and enables them to benefit from the wisdom and experience of others.

Making connections has advantages both for the adviser and for the activity program:

- Develop more creative projects by picking up new ideas from others.
- Use resources more effectively by learning about good sources of materials, training opportunities, publications, etc.
- Reduce the stress in your life and have more successful projects. You don't need to reinvent the wheel with every project—there's probably someone somewhere who has "been there, done that" and can offer advice on what worked for them.
- Develop a shared sense of mission by realizing that you're part of a broader effort than just your school. Gain a new view of student activities as student leadership development, not just sponsoring projects.

Effective advisers build connections in three main areas: local, state, and national.

## Local Connections

Partner with other groups in your school that have a similar philosophy or a shared goal, such as working on a charity project together. Often you can team up with other service-minded groups for better results and a larger impact. For example, for a silent auction one group could work on getting the donations, another group could handle the publicity, another could handle the physical setup of the auction, and so forth. People support what they create, so the more people involved, the more supporters you will have, translating into bigger success.

Another area in which student organizations have shared goals is in student leadership development. Work together to share resources and provide leadership training to leaders of all the groups on campus, not just your own. An overnight lock-in, a summer retreat, or a weekend workshop for officers and committee chairs could not only develop leadership skills but could build connections between groups that would make collaboration on future projects easier.

Working together on projects with other groups also has the advantage of not spreading students too thin. Rather than competing with other groups that likely have many of the same students in them, working together lets you avoid competing for the same involved students' time, money, or attention.

When you are looking to make local connections, don't forget about other schools in your district or county. Make connections with them for things like a daylong leadership workshop, inter-school exchanges, presidents' council meetings, and so forth. Your group/school might not be able to afford to bring in a speaker, but teaming up with other schools and splitting the expense could make it affordable. And just getting together to share ideas is beneficial.

There is one caveat about teaming up with other groups on projects: be sure to have each group's responsibilities carefully spelled out so that things don't slip through the cracks. Laying a clear set of ground rules can avoid stumbling blocks later. Consider things like whose budget will cover the expenses, how will profits be split, who is responsible for each aspect of the project, and so forth.

Finally, don't forget to build connections with local businesses, community groups, and parents. It's nice to be able to count on their support for your various programs. They are often the ones you turn to when you need a donation, but don't forget them at other times. Invite community and business leaders to your events and keep them informed of what your organization is accomplishing. You need their support when budgets get tight and your program finds itself on the chopping block. You're more likely to receive their support if you have an ongoing relationship with them.

## State Connections

Join the FCCLA state association and participate in its activities. These associations often offer specialized workshops for advisers during the school year that address specific needs of advisers and provide training, ideas, techniques, and motivation.

Attending these workshops is key to broadening vision. Sometimes you'll come back from a workshop or conference smugly thinking that your program is among the best in the state, other times you'll come back with plans and ideas to infuse new vitality into your program. Either way, you'll have an opportunity to interact with and draw from the creative efforts of others in positions similar to yours. You will expand your network and develop contacts with others who know what it's like to be in your shoes. Many advisers toil alone at their schools not even realizing that they need the connection to other advisers.

## National Connections

Look for national opportunities to build connections as well. Learn from the best and the brightest at FCCLA conferences and workshops including:

- **National Leadership Conference:** This five-day conference features national officer elections, STAR Events competitions, dynamic general sessions, national programs trainings, adviser workshops, exhibits, and much more—all held at an exciting location each summer.

- **National Cluster Meetings:** These weekend leadership conferences are held each fall in several cities across the U.S. Students and advisers participate in trainings and workshop sessions that challenge, inform, and motivate them to become leaders through FCCLA.

If traveling to a national conference just isn't in your budget, you can still interact with other advisers on a national level through online communities by sharing ideas and asking questions on message boards. For example, for people who teach a leadership class, visit <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/leaderlessons/> to share ideas with and ask questions of others who teach leadership. Or, network with activity advisers from many different organizations at the Alliance for Student Activities Web site: [www.alliance4studentactivities.org](http://www.alliance4studentactivities.org). Many state and national organizations have message boards, list serves, and wikis as well.

It all comes down to this: building connections and developing a network of support helps you get re-energized and keeps you sane. Many advisers who are in it for the long haul stay in because of the friendships they make at the state and national levels. They may only see these folks once or twice a year, but they have discovered kindred spirits who they can count on for ideas, advice, and support through good times and bad.

© Leadership Logistics 2007, [www.leadershiplogistics.us](http://www.leadershiplogistics.us); used with permission.