



**Southern Maine
Democratic Socialists of America**

Member Handbook

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Revision History

Revision	Date	Description
1	2019-12-05	Combined existing policy documents into one handbook for reference
2	2019-12-17	12/16 GM approved updates to Branch Dues Share policy to remove payment method
3	2019-12-29	Dues Waiver program adopted by SC and added to handbook
4	2020-9-14	Branch Dues share changed from shares to 70%/30% split with branches sharing a bank account.
5	2020-12-23	Added introduction (Wes P)

Introduction

This handbook is a collection of Southern Maine DSA's policies, ratified by the chapter, that guide how the chapter operates. These are different from our [bylaws](#) in that they can be suspended by a membership vote and do not require the same amount of time before ratification.

Basically, they're a bit easier to change as the need arises.

Harassment & Grievance Policy

Ratified by the Chapter on 2019-07-15

Overview

Southern Maine Democratic Socialists of America (SMDSA) is working to win a socialist world. To build it, we need to create systems and center values vastly unlike those that exist today. A key part of this project will be a justice system that can provide a restorative alternative to the state. We believe that a first step is to establish a socialist code of conduct.

Our code of conduct must define which actions are unwelcome. It then must clearly detail a democratic process to resolve conflict. The goal of such a code is to help make SMDSA a safe and just space. We must be thorough and firm in response to all risks to member safety. However, we don't aim to simply punish those who transgress. We aim to engage in a larger process that builds trust, fosters good faith, and strengthens our community.

This process will be long and may produce new outcomes as we learn what does or does not work. This code is not meant as a rigid set of rules, but as a living agreement open to trial and revision.

Definitions

For this policy, the word **member** refers to anyone who is in good standing with their dues and covered in SMDSA's bylaws. The word **grievance** refers to a complaint submitted to this process. The word **grievant** refers to those who submit the grievance. The word **accused** refers to those whom the grievance is about. The word **harassment** will refer to all harassment, discrimination, misconduct, and abuse.

Harassment is meant to include:

- Any pattern of conduct that makes others feel unsafe or unwell. This includes unwelcome attention; inappropriate or offensive remarks, slurs, jokes, or presentation of images; violence; threats of violence; stalking; intimidation; sustained disruptions after requests to stop.
- Any misconduct based on identity. This includes sex, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, physical appearance, disability, race, color, religion, national origin, class, age, profession, immigration status, mental illness, or neurotypicality.
- Any misconduct that implies submission is required to be a member of SMDSA.
- Any conduct that creates a hostile setting that harms a person's capacity to organize within SMDSA.
- Any other conduct that negatively affects a person's experience with SMDSA.

Code of Conduct

This code covers all harassment between SMDSA members, wherever it may take place. It also covers all harassment in SMDSA spaces. These spaces may be physical or virtual, public or private, formal or informal.

Harassment will not be tolerated. Any member who believes this code has been broken may submit a grievance through the process defined below.

Harassment Grievance Officers ("HGOs")

SMDSA shall elect three (3) HGOs. HGO seats will cover one (1) year, be elected annually, and observe no term limits. HGOs shall not also be members of the Steering Committee.

The election process for HGOs will be as follows:

- Members may be nominated by other members or may nominate themselves. Accepting a nomination makes the member a candidate.
- Candidates must be published to members at least thirty (30) days prior to election.
- Prior to election, members may communicate concerns about a candidate in writing to either the Steering Committee or the incumbent HGOs at their discretion. The identity of members who raise concerns will remain confidential. If the concerns are determined to be serious enough, the member's candidacy may be revoked.

- For the election, members will vote to approve each candidate individually. Candidates must receive at least ninety percent (90%) approval to continue.
- If after the approval round there are more candidates than vacancies, there will be a run-off ranked-choice election. Otherwise, all candidates will be seated.

Timeline

The grievance timeline will be as follows:

- The grievant will fill out the form on the website or email HGO@smdsa.org.
- Within seven (7) days of receiving a grievance, an HGO will contact the grievant in writing to acknowledge receipt of the grievance. The HGO will also contact the accused in writing to request their response.
- The accused will have seven (7) days after notification to respond in writing.
- HGOs will have fourteen (14) days to complete the investigation and make a recommendation to the Steering Committee.
- The Steering Committee will resolve the grievance within seven (7) days of receiving a recommendation from the HGOs.
- The Steering Committee will inform the grievant and the accused of their decision within seven (7) days of the decision.

Remedies & Penalties

The HGOs may decide that a grievance is not credible. In this event, they may recommend either no action or a voluntary, informal conflict resolution process. A majority of all seated members of the Steering Committee must also decide if a grievance is credible. If a grievance is credible, the Steering Committee may take some or all of the HGOs' recommendations for remedies and penalties. The Steering Committee may also add remedies or penalties of their own accord.

Remedies and penalties may include:

- A formal discussion between the accused and the Steering Committee to develop a plan to change the harassing behavior(s)
- Suspension from committee meetings and other chapter or organizational events
- Removal from chapter committee(s)
- Removal from holding leadership positions
- Removal from SMDSA

Remedies and penalties may be informed by, among other things:

- The request of the grievant
- The severity of the grievance
- The response of the accused
- The relevant behavioral history of the accused

Process. All parties are urged to refrain from discussing the process on social media, Discord, or with others.

Retaliation. This policy prohibits retaliation against any individual involved in the grievance process in any way, including the grievant and the accused. Retaliation includes threats, intimidation, reprisals, or other adverse actions. If any individual believes there has been retaliation, they may inform the HGOs. The HGOs will decide whether to factor this information into the original grievance or treat it as a new grievance.

Consensus. HGOs will strive for consensus in determining a grievance's credibility and remedy. Where consensus cannot be found, each HGO will prepare their own recommendations for the Steering Committee, who may use or adapt those to create their decision.

Recusal. HGOs shall recuse themselves from any grievance in which they do not feel they can remain impartial.

Removal. If either the grievant or the accused feel that an HGO may not be impartial, they may request that the HGO be removed from the grievance. The other HGOs will review the request and decide whether to remove the HGO from the grievance or not. If there is a request to remove all HGOs from a grievance, the Steering Committee will review the request and decide. If either the grievant or the accused is a member of the Steering Committee or an HGO, they will automatically be removed from the grievance.

Appeals. To appeal a decision, any party may follow the appeals process in National DSA's Resolution 33

Expense Policy

Ratified by the Chapter on 2018-12-10

Purpose

To inform members of their rights and obligations related to chapter expenses and reimbursements, and to lay out the rules and method for approval of those expenses.

Background

Officers and members of Southern Maine DSA (SMDSA) regularly incur non-fixed expenditures in the course of organizing efforts outside of known budget items and recurring operating expenses. Further, various branches, committees, working groups, caucuses, and campaigns within SMDSA may pursue sanctioned activities that incur their own expenditures.

Expense Approval

Whether by using SMDSA funds directly or through reimbursement, all expenditures require approval:

- \$75 or less by the acting Treasurer or an acting Co-Chair
- greater than \$75 and less than \$200 by a majority of the Steering Committee
- \$200 or more by the General Membership

For critical expenditures that cannot await a General Membership vote, the Steering Committee may approve expenditures with unanimous consent per the Bylaws, provided that the expenditure is announced to the membership at the following General Meeting.

Members should seek approval for expenses prior to their expenditure, and any expenses not approved in advance are subject to the discretion of the approval described above.

Branches, committees, working groups, caucuses, and campaigns may perform fundraising or collect donations for their own respective use. The chapter Treasurer shall record and retain such funds until they are requested for expenditure, and such funds will not be subject to the approval guidelines defined above.

Payment and Reimbursement Process

Option 1: Pre-approval

- Submit a request to the treasurer via email (officer name and contact information available on the SMDSA website). Include:
 - requestor's name and contact information,
 - payment recipient,
 - dollar amount,
 - and reasoning/intended use of funds
- Following the decision of the appropriate approvers, the requester may:
 - share details for how the treasurer can directly cover the costs of the expense
 - or, collect a check made out to the recipient, either at the soonest General Meeting or by arrangement with the treasurer

Option 2: Reimbursement

- In the event that a member has already incurred expenses on behalf of SMDSA, they may submit a request via email (officer name and contact information available on the SMDSA website) including:
 - requestor's name and contact information,
 - date of transaction,
 - dollar amount,
 - documentation of transaction in the form of a receipt or paid invoice (bank and credit card statements are insufficient for audit purposes),
 - and reasoning/use of funds

If using email in either case is prohibitive, please gather the required information on paper and submit it to the treasurer in person.

Local Pass-the-Hat Program

Ratified by the Steering Committee on 2019-09-03

Background

SMDSA receives 20% of the monthly dues our members pay to our national organization. SMDSA receives 0% of the annual dues our members send. Our dues share for the first quarter of 2019 was \$488 which averages out to about \$162 a month.

There are many problems with this system. The national DSA dues share program is inconsistent and unpredictable. We currently have a member list of about 450 members, 250 with active dues, with less than 100 paying monthly dues. As an estimate, we only receive 8% of the dues money members in our state are sending to National. This isn't funding our local.

Local Pass-the-Hat would provide the chapter with a consistent income base which would allow for consistent project spending and a stronger infrastructure. Local Pass-the-Hat would also give financial supporters flexibility to better decide how much they give to National and how much they give to their Local.

This is in compliance with both the National and Local Bylaws under which we operate.

The Local Dues Program

SMDSA will begin a program to collect monthly local funds in excess of National Dues. Paying local funds through Pass-the-Hat does not put an individual on the national membership list, and as such, this will not replace the need to pay National dues in whatever denomination or method individuals so choose.

With the passage of this program, we will:

- Set up a platform allowing members to pay additional monthly funds straight to the local.
- Add a link to the Local Pass-the-Hat platform to our website.
- Send an email to members explaining the significance and how to participate
- Add a session to the General Meetings to explain the significance and how to participate.

Branch Dues Sharing Policy

Updated by the Chapter on 2020-9-14

Background

SMDSA includes every DSA member in Maine. Members pay dues to National DSA; some pay annually while others pay monthly. SMDSA receives 20% of the monthly dues and 0% of the annual dues. SMDSA received \$1,338 for the Third quarter of 2020.

While the branches are part of the chapter, they are pretty autonomous and geographically spread out. To address this, we move to start a Branch Dues Share program, retroactive to the start of 2019, that shares a portion of our National dues-share with our branches. This provides our branches with operating funds in the immediate term, creates statewide cohesion in fundraising efforts in the medium term, and builds toward a chapter in every county in the long term. It is not intended to be a substitute for requests for funds for other needs. Those requests will be handled according to the existing expense policy.

This program is flexible. If we add or drop branches, or our branches grow unevenly, we can update the shares. If our dues income decreases, we all share in the risk; if it increases, we share the reward. Every new member helps every branch, creating a true rising tide program.

The Branch Dues Sharing Program

- 30% of all Dues Shares will be held in reserve for Branch organizing in a separate bank account. They are to be used collectively by all Branches.

Communications Policy

Ratified by the Chapter on 2018-12-10

Purpose

To increase our capacity to reach new members, deepen our engagement with existing members, and facilitate communication between members for the purpose of organizing for collective power.

Objectives

- To diversify our communications channels to make communication easier for all members, regardless of how they connect with us.
- To identify goals and stakeholders for each channel and create systems that work for them.
- To reduce redundancies and tighten workflow.

Communication Channel Strategies

- **Website and Blog**
 - To create a welcoming, inclusive online “home” for all people in southern Maine who are interested in democratic socialism. To increase awareness of, and attract new members to our chapter and DSA at large. To educate the public and our members about socialism, share news of our chapter’s activities, and create a public record of our mission, vision, and organizational structure.
- **Telephone Tree**
 - To communicate messages which require a more personal interface, such as welcoming new members, asking about a member’s health or wellbeing, organizing important activities, or for reinforcing critical communications that have been sent out by other means.
- **General Email List**
 - To communicate non-confidential information, and news of our chapter to a broad audience with the purpose of encouraging non-members to join, and members to engage more deeply in the work of the chapter.

- **Member-Only Email List**
 - To send official, potentially sensitive, non-urgent correspondence to DSA members regarding meetings, events, actions, and to share documents, such as meeting minutes, policies, or materials related to an upcoming vote.
- **Google Groups**
 - To provide a forum for discussion and file sharing at the committee level. All Google groups and shared documents are to be set up under the DSA.SouthernMaine@gmail account by the chapter secretary and administered and maintained by the chairperson for that committee.
- **Google Calendar**
 - To provide our members and the general public a centralized calendar for all DSA-sponsored and co-sponsored meetings and events. The Google calendar is linked directly to our website's Calendar page, and functions as the outward facing record of our Chapter's official activities. (See Facebook Events Calendar for further clarification.)
- **Google Drive**
 - To provide a central repository of all documents created by and for the chapter, including member databases, financial and incorporation documents, meeting minutes, policies, committee work, and educational materials.
- **Facebook**
 - To function as a gateway for new members to be introduced to Democratic Socialism, DSA, and the SMDSA. This page should be managed in such a way that it draws members and potential new members to our meetings, regional groups, and committee work, not as a substitute for those forums.
- **Facebook Events Calendar**
 - To provide our members and the general public another channel for accessing DSA-sponsored and co-sponsored meetings and events. Community sponsored events that we lend our support to and wish to encourage our members' attendance at may also be listed here, but not necessarily on the Google calendar.
- **Twitter**
 - To raise awareness of the activities of the Southern Maine DSA to the general public, our membership, and to other chapters of the DSA. To foster a fun, spirited, and socially-conscious online presence that shares important socialist discussion points, articles on matters

important to us, and, of course, memes. To connect with socialists and normies all across the web and let them know that we are here *and* that we stand for political, social, economic, and all other kinds of justice.

- **Discord (BETA)**

- To provide a casual avenue for members to communicate between meetings via both text and audio channels, allowing members to discuss chapter events or other general topics. Public channels may also be used to invite allies to have conversations with chapter members. Member-only channels facilitate conversations about our planning that we may not want public at the time. Steering Committee channels may act in a similar vein as the google e-mail group, though official votes and business should still be handled over e-mail for those that may not find Discord accessible. Moderation rights shall be given to all Steering Committee members. Audio channels may facilitate remote participation in committee meetings or other discussions where physical presence cannot or may not need to happen.

Membership List Policy

Ratified by the Chapter on 2019-10-14

SMDSA's membership list includes every DSA member in the state of Maine. This list includes sensitive information such as their addresses, contact information, and even names of family members and children. Many members wish to keep their membership information private for professional or personal reasons. Therefore, it is incumbent upon the chapter to keep this list as secure as possible. To this end, the chapter Steering Committee has developed the following parameters around using our official membership list, herein referred to as "the list".

The list shall only be available to the members of the Steering Committee (Officers and the elected Chairs of Committees and Branches). The list may be made available to other parties, but only with the express consent of the Steering Committee.

The list shall only be used for DSA-related work. The list shall not be used for relaying any information or event that is not directly related to, or endorsed by, National DSA, the Southern Maine DSA chapter, or any of its Maine branches. Copies of the list shall only be made with express consent of the Steering Committee.

Anyone found to have knowingly broken any of the parameters listed above may face loss of access, recall from elected office, or removal from the chapter

Press Releases

Ratified by the Chapter on 2018-12-10

Purpose

To document and outline the process for developing and approving SMDSA press releases, and securing and approving supporting quotes from SMDSA for press releases, position statements, and publicity efforts by third parties such as DSA Members, other DSA Chapters, allied organizations, and the National DSA. **All internal press releases and third-party publicity requests must follow this protocol.**

Background

Press releases typically require a quick turn-around and are publicly visible for a limited period of time. *Third-party publicity requests* are typically requests for support for items that may remain publicly visible for a significant period of time. This policy seeks to provide an expedient process that facilitates message control, while also including the broadest possible participation from Members.

I. Internal Press Releases

Press Release opportunities include, but are not limited to:

- SMDSA candidate and issue endorsements
- SMDSA direct actions
- SMDSA committee work
- Public events attended by SMDSA Members in support of our mission
- Political action taken by individual SMDSA Members in support of our mission
- Awards, honors, publications or other achievements by individual SMDSA Members that enhance our public image
- Newsworthy items on which SMDSA may wish to provide a position statement

Internal SMDSA press releases may be suggested, developed and/or written by any SMDSA Member, SMDSA Committee, or ad hoc Committee commissioned for that purpose.

Press releases must be submitted to the SMDSA Communications Committee for review and alignment with SMDSA's current goals. Press releases must be approved by at least one member of the Steering Committee before distribution. All requests for press releases will be considered confidential. Draft press releases may be submitted for development/approval by emailing it to the Communications Committee at DSA.SouthernMaine@gmail.com

The Communications Committee will create and regularly update a list of press contacts for use with SMDSA Press Releases. Email contacts will be maintained within MailChimp. Press releases may also be sent via other communications channels such as Twitter. Suggestions for press contacts may be submitted to the Communications Committee.

Once a subject and desired distribution date is determined, the press release approval process is as follows:

1. One or more members of the Communications Committee drafts or edits the press release and sends it to the Communications Committee Chairperson (or designated proxy).
2. The Communications Committee Chairperson reviews the press release, incorporates any changes and sends it to the Steering Committee.
3. The Steering Committee reviews the press release, and, depending on the complexity of the issue and the timeliness of the topic: a) fast tracks the release, or b) brings it to the General Membership for discussion.
4. The Steering Committee incorporates any feedback and/or changes, and sends it back to the Communications Committee.
5. The Communications Committee reviews, finalizes and distributes the revised press release.

II. Third-Party Publicity Requests

Requests for supporting quotes from SMDSA for press releases and publicity efforts by third parties must outline a specific press release or public relations/publicity activity for which a supporting SMDSA quotation is desired. Requests should be directed to the SMDSA Communications Committee at **DSA.SouthernMaine@gmail.com**

All requests must contain a draft of the press release or other materials, the suggested quote (if applicable), and the expected announcement or completion date.

Once received, the process for obtaining SMDSA approval for supporting press release quotes is as follows:

1. Third Party submits suggested quote and draft press release and may recommend an SMDSA Officer or Member to serve as a Spokesperson to whom the quote will be attributed.
2. If no quote or Spokesperson is recommended, the SMDSA Communications Committee may assign a Spokesperson. The Spokesperson selected cannot be from the Third Party. Otherwise, all SMDSA Members are considered qualified Spokespeople.
3. SMDSA Communications Committee submits the recommendation to the SMDSA Steering Committee and Spokesperson for approval, along with the full press release and/or supporting documentation for context.
4. SMDSA Steering Committee reviews the recommendation, incorporates any changes or feedback and sends it back to the SMDSA Communications Committee
5. SMDSA Communications Committee reviews, finalizes and returns approved quote to third party.

Recording

Ratified by the Chapter on 2018-12-10

The Southern Maine chapter of the Democratic Socialists of America ("SMDSA") is committed to open, transparent, and accessible public discourse, while also ensuring the freedom of its members to communicate without the fear of being secretly recorded without their consent.

Therefore, NO person -- including but not limited to members, visitors, and invited guests -- may record conversations of another without their prior knowledge and consent. Recordings include audio and/or video by any means.

Prohibited recording devices include but are not limited to phones, smartphones, audio recorders, video cameras, cameras, and microphones.

Any individual requesting to record via audio or video any persons at an SMDSA meeting or event will need to request and be granted prior authorization by the SMDSA Steering Committee. The SMDSA Steering Committee reserves the right to refuse such requests, at their sole discretion.

SMDSA reserves the right to use cameras and recording devices for the purposes of accessibility for the benefit of members, solely with the express knowledge of those attending.

If an approved recording is in effect, individuals may still refuse to be recorded and at such time may end any conversation with the recording party.

Those who refuse to comply with this policy may be asked to leave the premises of the meeting.

Dues Waiver Program

Ratified by the Steering Committee on 2019-12-29

“From each according to their ability, to each according to their needs.” - Karl Marx

DSA is a self-funded organization. We self-fund by having members pay a fee for membership, aka “dues.” Members may pay dues in whatever amount they are comfortable with.

Being self-funded is central to our mission. When organizations are funded by wealthy donors, they become influenced by that money. Sometimes that influence is direct - the wealthy donors give orders and the members or volunteers follow them. Sometimes it’s subconscious, like members being hesitant to make decisions that would upset their donors. However, by having a member-run and member-funded organization, we are accountable to only ourselves. This is people power in practice.

At the same time, we recognize that times are tough and the working class is being squeezed by every system we interact with: skyrocketing health care and housing costs, crushing student loans, unlivable wages at work, with little to no sick or vacation time to escape these chains. Our movement won’t be successful until it is a mass working-class movement. We absolutely will not exclude anyone based on their inability to pay dues. If dues are a barrier for you, our chapter will subsidize memberships with no questions asked.

It’s a pretty simple process:

1. Tell us that you wish to become a member but need financial sponsorship.
2. We’ll schedule a meeting with you to go through the membership signup and cover the costs for you, and answer any questions you might have about DSA, our chapter, or organizing goals you have in general.

That’s it! We look forward to organizing alongside you soon. Solidarity Forever.

Standing Rules

Ratified by the Chapter on 2018-08-20

1. Endorsing Ballot Initiatives and Candidates requires a 2/3rds vote (Adopted 2018-08-20)
2. Non-endorsed candidates may not speak at meetings/stump in their official capacity as candidates (Adopted 2018-08-20)
3. Endorsed candidates do not gain access to the SMDSA membership lists in any way