

Forming a High School MSA

Step 1: Make Your Decision

Before you start forming your MSA, you must first be firm in your decision to that you want to start one. An MSA is a very useful club to have at your high school and can benefit all people involved or all faiths. This is why, if you want to form an MSA, you must be firm in your decision. You must also be willing to complete the task once it's started.

Step 2: Survey for Interested Members

After you've made your decision to start an MSA, you should survey people in your high school to see if they are interested. First, ask your Muslim friends and market your idea to them. Don't worry if you only have 1 or 2 interested people. It's completely okay to start an MSA with a small number. Once you get started and are successful, more people will join. Use language and techniques that would interest your friends and make them want to join the MSA.

If you are in a public school, make sure that you emphasize that your MSA is an academic group and not a religious one. You are not trying to convert people to Islam, you are trying to educate people and correct stereotypes. Refer to the section titled "Purpose of your group" for more information.

Try to reach every single Muslim or person interested in Islam at your school. Keep in mind that an MSA is as much for Muslims as it is to educate people of other faiths about Islam.

Step 3: Make a List

Make a list of every person who is interested in an MSA. On that list you should include as much of the following information as possible:

- Name
- Graduating Year/Class
- Address

- Phone numbers (home & cell)
 - Email address
 - AIM/ICQ/MSN screen names
 - School activities that they've already committed to and the times of those activities.
 - Talent applicable to the MSA (Quran recitation, artist, writer, communicator...etc).
- Make this list in Microsoft Excel or in MS Word. Try to keep an electronic copy rather than writing your list on a piece of paper. That way it's hard to lose and it's easier to distribute to the members of your group and to the school administration.

Step 4: Create a Core Group

Some of the people that you will recruit will probably fall under this core group. The core group is a team of individuals (from 2 to 7 members) who are dedicated to making an MSA work. It's difficult for one person to manage all the things necessary to achieve a successful MSA. Choose a core group of diverse people to help you organize and market your MSA. When choosing these people, think of the following:

- **Persistence:** You may experience some reluctance from the faculty and the administration when starting your MSA. That's why your core group should be persistent. They shouldn't quit after the first bump in the road. If you come up against any reluctance, emphasize that your MSA is for anyone interested in learning and clearing misconceptions about Islam. This may facilitate school approval.
- **Organization and Balance:** One of the most important things your core group should have is organization. You should be organized especially if you plan on having your MSA join the MIST tournament. Balance is also very important. Your core group should be able to balance MSA with other activities that they are involved with. For example, if someone is in the MSA as well as the soccer team, it's important that they do not miss MSA meetings and activities because of their soccer games and practices.

Step 5: Creating A Plan

Once you've decided on your core group and before you can look for a teacher sponsor, you must have a set plan for the year. For your convenience, we have a [Sample MSA Plan](#). Please download it and edit it as you see fit. Your plan must include the following list.

1. Purpose of your group. Examples can be:
 - A place where students can freely talk about their religion and discuss common problems
 - Clear stereotypical misconceptions about Islam in your high school
 - Carry out Social, cultural, and religious activities
 - ****Provide an educational outlook on Islam and clear stereotypical misconceptions. We recommend that whatever your goals, this particular purpose/goal should be listed in your plan and constitution. This is the most important goal for an MSA: to educate **All** people regardless of their beliefs, race, gender...etc about Islam.**
2. Timetable: Your plan should include a timetable. The timetable should have a list of actions and an estimated time of completion. Examples of tasks to be accomplished in your timetable are:
 - Creating an Executive Board that includes at least a President, Secretary and Treasurer. This can happen before the group has started or once you've formed your group, you can hold elections. If you choose to hold elections, you should have a temporary President who will be the main contact until a new president has been elected. Refer to the section below titled "Executive Board and Elections" for more information.
 - Finding a Sponsor
 - Time of first meeting
 - Finalization of Constitution
 - First event planned. Your group's first event can be MIST. This can be a reason why your participants will want to meet weekly.
 - End of year elections
3. Audience of your Group: Although it is one of the most important parts of your group plan, most people forget to identify their audience. This section should state who can be members of the MSA. It is important that everyone involved in your group, especially if your MSA is formed in a public school, understand that MSA is open to everyone, Muslim and non-Muslim who is interested in learning about Islam. This is a great way to attract sponsors and students alike. When writing your plan, make sure to put the previous statement under the heading of "Types of Members"

Step 6: Creating A Constitution

[Sample Constitution](#)

Get together with your core group and finalize a constitution. If you're the only Muslim, that's ok. The key aspect to this constitution is the purpose we stated, which was to provide an educational outlook on Islam and clear stereotypical misconceptions. Remember that this club is open to everyone, Muslim and non-Muslim and should not be exclusive to a certain group of Muslims. Your constitution should have a set plan for the year so all future leaders will always know what to do, even if you're not there to advise them. Feel free to use the sample constitution we've provided above.

Step 7: Talk to your Principal/Vice Principal

To ensure that you are following protocol, set up a meeting with your school principal or Vice Principal. Typically, the vice principal is the individual to approach in order to form a club of this nature. Clubs in some of the larger high schools are handled by the activities director who is sometimes part of the sports department. If you're unsure who to go to, ask the school secretary.

Once you've made an appointment with the school official, make sure you are very professional during the meeting. Wear professional clothes and bring with you your Plan and Constitution. Also, bring a signed list of students who want to join your group. Ask the principal if there are any specific guidelines that you have to follow in order to form a club in your school. Make sure you communicate to your principal that the purpose of your group is educational and not religious. Your purpose is to provide an educational outlook on Islam and clear stereotypical misconceptions. You may also explain that you are trying to provide a place for students to express their culture to others who share the same background or to those who are interested in learning about different cultures.

Some school officials might be reluctant to allow the formation of your MSA. They may attempt to waylay the formation of the MSA by delaying the processing of paperwork or adding restrictions or requirements at random. Make sure to be persistent. Keep after your school officials with daily inquiries on the status of your paperwork and formation. Make sure your entire core group is keeping up with the inquiries. Do not let delays and reluctance on the part of the administration deter you. Do not, however, become impatient or impolite. Remember always to be cordial and respectful.

If you have any problems during this step, please email us at mist.info@gmail.com . We will be able to help you further.

Step 8: Find a sponsor

Finding a sponsor might come after you've spoken to your administrator or before it. It all depends on what your school requires before you present your idea to your school official. Some schools require that you find a sponsor first, others require that you get permission to start an organization and then go on to finding a sponsor. Whatever may be the case at your school, finding a sponsor is a big step and requires a lot of persistence because most faculty do not want to dedicate their free time to meetings.

Make sure your core group asks every teacher they can to sponsor them. It is better to have a willing sponsor than a reluctant one, so do not hound a potential sponsor if another teacher can be found who is happy to fill the position. The following techniques should help you find a sponsor for your MSA:

1. **Seek a Muslim Sponsor:** If your school has any Muslim teachers, make sure you ask him/her first before you ask any other teacher. Normally, a Muslim teacher will be more willing to assist you with your MSA. If you have more than one Muslim teacher at your school, choose the one with the most knowledge about Islam. If the Muslim teacher is reluctant to sponsor the MSA, remind them of the following:
 - **The Ummah:** We are Muslims in non-Muslim countries. As such, it is the duty of each and every one of us to inform and educate others about Islam. One person alone and without Islamic education may not feel they can make much of a difference. Although the sponsor is not informing and educating others directly, he/she is facilitating the process for others to do so.
 - Show the sponsor how professional you are and how much work you've already put into starting this group. Show him/her your constitution and your plan of action. Show him the list of students interested and remind him that although he/she must be present during a meeting, you are not expecting them to do any work other than simply advise you when you really need it. Show them that you are responsible and that you have a group of responsible students who will be sharing the work. It might convince the sponsor when he sees that you have taken care of most of the work.

2. Finding any Sponsor: In the event that you don't have any Muslim teachers in your high school, try to persuade a non-Muslim sponsor. Here are some pointers:
 - Remind the sponsor that teachers are, above all, educators who believe in the institution of education. In this post 9/11 climate, intolerance and aggression is bred from ignorance. As an educator, Muslim or otherwise, it is important to sustain an environment to promote education, prevent intolerance, clear stereotypes, lessen aggression due to misunderstanding. Tell your sponsor that these same goals are what make up your MSA.
 - Your MSA's purpose is to provide leadership and education to both its members and the community. Tell your teacher that by sponsoring the MSA, he/she is creating an environment for Muslims to learn about their religion and for people of other faiths to become educated about Islam. Stress the point that education on Islam is needed by both Muslims and non-Muslims to help ease intolerance and unite people.

Some sponsors might use some common excuses not to sponsor your MSA. The following pointers will help you convince your potential sponsor:

1. Religion in public school: Some faculty members are concerned because they are afraid of having religion in public schools. If your sponsor mentions this point to you, remind them that allowing an MSA is not an incorporation of religion in public schools, but rather, it is a facilitation of an educational extracurricular club, established for the purpose of promoting the understanding of Islam. Because of that purpose, MSA is an academic club because it promotes the education of others. Also, if you use MIST as your main activity, your purpose for forming an MSA is to join an interscholastic tournament.
2. Not enough time: This is the biggest reason most teachers are reluctant to sponsor an MSA. Most High schools require the sponsor be present at all meetings, and teachers are reluctant to give their free time to a club. There are a few techniques to help:
 - **Foot-in-the-door:** Get them to commit to one meeting a week, which is perfectly reasonable. As you expand your activities, request more of their time, or ask for more meeting time without his or her presence. Start with a small commitment and build on it.
 - **Parental involvement:** Remind them that the parents of the core group will be involved and more than willing to help.

- **Above Arguments:** If this is the only thing holding your potential sponsor back, use some of the arguments listed above to convince them to make time for the MSA.
 - **Multiple Sponsors:** Some sponsors are reluctant to accept the entire responsibility for the club, however they are still interested in helping out. In this situation, it might be beneficial to seek out two sponsors: a primary sponsor whose name will be appended to the paperwork, and a secondary sponsor, who will assume responsibility when the first is unable to. Forging an agreement of this kind between two teachers helps both feel relieved of the time commitment to the club. However, it is better organizationally to have one sponsor if you can find one. So endeavor to find one who is willing to take the full sponsorship.
3. **I'm not Muslim:** Often times, non-Muslim teachers will be uncomfortable with assisting a group that practices another religion than his or her own. They will feel unable to provide the MSA with guidance. While it is true they are unable to be a resource of knowledge, they can provide the type of guidance necessary to run an organized club, and that is all you'll need to start an MSA. Remind them they are only needed as a facilitator, not as a spiritual advisor, especially since the MSA is an academic organization. Also remind them that the main objective of the MSA is to be educational and since they are educators, they are more than qualified to sponsor the MSA.

As you look for a sponsor, the most important thing you need to ensure is that the teacher you ask understands the purpose of the group you are forming. Just keep in mind that the club is one in which ANYONE can come and learn about Islam...it is NOT exclusive.

Step 8: Forming the MSA

Now that you have your school's approval, all the paperwork is in order, and you have a sponsor, you will now start forming your MSA:

Who will be the leader?

As with anything else, you need to decide who will lead your MSA. One of the most popular ways is to hold elections where people get nominated, they speak about what they are going to do for the MSA, and then the members vote. Another way is for the core group to elect someone to lead the MSA.

Depending on the size of your school and your MSA, you might need more than just an MSA President. Here is a list of possible officials for your MSA. These positions are electable:

1. **President:**The president is responsible for overseeing everything that goes on within the organization. He/She should delegate responsibilities and check on the progress of activities. He/She should act as the public face of the organization (with the help of any public relations representatives).
2. **Vice President:**The vice president assists the president to oversee operations. The vice presidency will be granted to the individual who receives the second-largest amount of votes in the election. When the president can't attend a meeting or is unavailable, the Vice President takes over.
3. **Treasurer:** The treasurer is responsible for creating a budget for all anticipated projects and should coordinate all fundraising activities and record-keeping procedures. The treasurer is responsible for allocating funds and handling all financial transactions.
4. **Secretary:** The secretary keeps minutes, takes down ideas, policy changes, and action items, and sees to the archiving of that information, or dissemination of that information accordingly. The Secretary is one of the most important positions in an MSA.
5. **Activities Coordinator:**The activities coordinator comes up with various activities within the MSA. He/she plan with the help of others and coordinate the day to day affairs of activities. For larger MSAs, you might want to split this position into two, one for sisters and one for brothers. Most high school MSAs, however, will have one person running all the activities.
6. **Public Relations Director:** The public relations director will take care of advertising MSA activities in the community and in the school. He/she will be responsible for creating flyers and getting them approved by your high school for posting. He/she will also be responsible for any marketing material created for your MSA such as an MSA newsletter/newspaper, MSA mailing list...etc.

Step 6: Holding Your First Meeting

Ok, so at this point, you have a sponsor. Time to plan the first meeting! MAKE SURE your meeting date and time is on the school's daily bulletin. Make sure it is announced in the morning announcements at LEAST a week prior to the meeting, the day before

the meeting, and the morning of the meeting. In the announcement...be sure to mention the purpose of the club. Put up posters around the school to advertise as well, tying the purpose into them, like everything else. During the first meeting, emphasize the goals for the club, have everyone introduce themselves and say what they hope to attain from the club, give out the tentative agenda, and delegate! =) Announce the date/time of the next meeting/activity at the end. [Sample Meeting Flyer](#)

When you have your first meeting, it's best to have a few ice breakers to allow people to get comfortable. Ice breakers also allow members to meet one another. You should also have some refreshments such as Pizza and Drinks. Make sure you get other people from your core group to help out with refreshments.

Sample Projects and Activities for your MSA

The one thing that will make members want to come back to your MSA and attend meetings is if your MSA takes part in an event. Since you're still young and your MSA is just new, concentrate on one activity from the following.

Multicultural day:

Most high schools host a multicultural day, where the various foods, dances, and festivities from the ethnicities of the student body are represented. MSA's have found great success in educating their school about Islam and other cultures through this activity..

There is no better way to exemplify the diversity contained in Islam than through a sampling of the various foods Muslims create. Try to set up a table and get someone from each ethnicity to bring food to serve. Whether you are selling the food to raise funds for your MSA, or passing out samples, include informational guides about Islam and Muslims to distribute. Consider also allowing other ethnic non-Muslim groups to join your multicultural day. You can join with other cultural clubs such as the asian club, the international club, the back student club...etc. This way not only do other students learn about members of your club, but you also learn about members of theirs.

It might also be productive to have visual aids at each culture's table. Wear the native dress of your culture on that day. Make a display of the table, by including illustrations

of the various countries from which your members originate. Bring photographs of your native country, if you're born outside the states, or pictures from there. Show people that Muslims are diverse and make it clear that we aren't going anywhere.

Another suggestion for your multicultural day is to have a Henna Handpainting Booth. Not only is this a very popular way of attracting attention to your MSA, it is also a great way to raise funds. Pick 2 or 3 members of your school who can do henna painting. Decide on a price range such as: easy designs: \$5, whole hand designs: \$10.00. Make sure to print your price sheet and make it available for people to see. Also have some designs printed on some paper so people can get ideas for what they want to do.

Speaker/Fundraising dinner:

A good way to raise funds and promote awareness and education is through a dinner hosted by your MSA at the school, where all the parents of the student body are invited. If you are intent on raising funds at this dinner, please select an appropriate cause for those funds to go towards such as Sponsoring the trip to MIST regionals/nationals, Islamic Relief, Kind Hearts, Red Cross society. Consider having a fundraising dinner for a cause such as helping hurricane relief efforts or other natural disaster relief efforts. This is a great way to educate your high school about Islam's mercy and how Muslims care about others who are in distress.

You'll want a speaker who can talk to a non-Muslim crowd about Islam, Muslims and the history of Muslims, but at the same time keep the Muslims parents who are bound to show up engaged. Here are some possible topics:

- **Women and Islam:** Have the speaker talk about the rights of women in Islam. The speaker should also address some of the common stereotypes that people have about women in Islam. Other topics to cover include Hijab, history of women in Islam.
- **Islam, Christianity, & Judaisim:** This dinner can concentrate on commonalities found between the world's 3 religions of Islam, Christianity, and Judiasim. Stay away from anything controversial. Make sure to address only commonalities. Perhaps you can get your school's Jewish group and Christian groups to co-sponsor the event and bring their own speakers.
- **Islamic Rituals:** This topic can concentrate on the basics of Islam. Many people don't know about Islam. Your speaker should talk about Islamic basics such as Prayer, Ramadan, Eid, and Hajj...etc.

A speaker's bureau is available through MSA National. Once a speaker has been arranged for a set date in which your school can provide the cafeteria or some sort of hall, you can begin sending out invitations.

Directories are typically offered by the school, and contain all the names, numbers and mailing addresses of the students. You'll want to make an invitation letter and mail it "to the parents of" the students listed. In the letter, provide a method through which the parents can order tickets to the event. They can pay in advance or at the door.

You'll want to choose a Muslim caterer who serves an ethnic food that is not too spicy. Make sure no nuts or fish is included, in consideration of those with allergies. MSA's have had good success with Lebanese and Afghan food in the past.

As always, visual aids are wonderful to have in addition to the speech. If your MSA can afford it, Discover Islam offers an excellent poster set for exhibition.

Bake Sale:

A good way to raise funds and awareness without a large overhead is a bake sale. Typical box mixes are very inexpensive and easy to make. Brownies and cookies sell well. If you have some ambitious cooks, try preparing Baklava (Baklava), Kanafa, or some other type of ethnic sweet. Make sure to give out informational brochures with each sweet sold, and keep a supply on the table for those who are interested but don't want to buy anything.

You can reserve a space in the entrance lobby with your school administrator. Try to arrange for a fold up table to be borrowed from the lunch hall through your sponsor. After school, as most students board the busses, is the best time to hold a bake sale. Make sure to get school approval to sell food first.

Exhibition:

Yet another good way to raise awareness is through an exhibition. An exhibition can take place in conjunction with numerous other activities, such as Multicultural day and a Speaker's dinner. Exhibitions can consist of informative posters and displays, Islamic art and photography, and videos relating to Muslims. One such example is the Discover Islam poster set, consisting of 20 posters about Islam and Muslims. Discover Islam also offers a 10 poster set of "Islam and Women" posters, which can be presented in

conjunction with women's history month. The posters are available for purchase through MSA National at a discount. You can also ask your local mosque to see if they have purchased a copy and if you can borrow it.

Local universities often have an art exhibition area, where student art is displayed. Seek out a local university (contact MSA National for university MSA's in your area) and arrange with one of the art students to have a display of various artists at your school.

Movie Night: The screening of films is also an attractive exhibition. Several films are available such as: The Message (Al-Resala), The Lion of the Desert, The Hajj: One American's pilgrimage to Mekkah, Islam: Empire of Faith (PBS), Muhammad: Legacy of a Prophet (PBS) These films are available through Astrolabe. Make sure you do not charge to see the films, because piracy issues come into play if you do. To have a charged screening, you must contact the proprietor of the films. Here is a [Sample Flyer](#) for your Movie Night.

Eid and Ramadan:

Most people in the United States have no idea what Eid and Ramadan are. Try to organize an educational lecture on Ramadan and Eid, perhaps in conjunction with a multicultural day or an exhibition. Ask your social studies or homeroom teacher to allow a speaker to come in during that time and talk about the two events.

Osborn High School (Manassas, VA) has previously allowed the Muslim teacher there to speak during History and Social studies about Islam and the hijab, in order to promote tolerance and understanding.

Food and Clothing drives are a really great way to get into the spirit of Ramadan, and show non-Muslims the generosity of Islam. MSA National sponsors an event called "The Ramadan Fast-A-Thon," along with a manual on how to run a Fast a thon. Details of which are located here: <http://www.fastathon.org>.

For Eid, try to garner some space in the school display cases. Bring Lanterns and pictures of world-wide Eid celebrations. Make display boards with explanations of Eid, and decorate the case with the shawls of a Shavarkamis, Sari, or Redaa'. Cover the display boards with pictures of masajid, and celebrations from Muslims countries.

Eid may also be a good time to have an Islamic Awareness Week. (IAW) IAW is a series of events. The program was developed and continues to be sponsored by MSA National.

MSA National is producing an electronic guide for Islam awareness week that will be available through the website. Please see the site for more.

Group trips:

If there are ruins, mountains, oceans, or even just a park near by, take the MSA for a visit. Take a trip and have a mountain's peak halaqa, site the many references of natural wonder in the Quran. How then should we be effected? Traveling through the earth is an excellent way to keep an open perspective, and make us greater appreciate the wonder of Allah's creation.