



THE FAI GUIDE TO STARTING A MICROFINANCE CLUB

The Financial Access Initiative (FAI) offers the following guidelines and suggestions to students who want to establish a microfinance club at their college or university and become part of the FAI Student Network.

Connect with other people interested in founding the Club

Often there are message boards in central campus locations, such as cafeterias and bookstores, where you can make postings to attract interest in the club. Online postings are also a good idea. For example, if you have a profile on a social networking site, such as MySpace or Facebook, post your interest in forming a club. Fellow classmates who connect to you may be interested, too. Many universities have online discussion boards for students, so this is another good place to post your interest in starting a club. A good face-to-face tactic is to ask professors of relevant courses (Finance, Economics, etc.) to allow you to make a brief announcement about founding the club at the beginning of class. Include your contact information in your announcement so that students can get in touch with you. School administrators, such as the Dean of Students (or a similar administrator) may know of other students in your program with a similar interest and can connect you to them. Finally, talk to as many people as you can about your idea, even those who aren't interested, because they may know someone who is.

Establish a mission, objectives and strategy

A mission statement that includes the objectives and strategy of your club will serve as a guide going forward, so creating this should be your first step. Try to be as specific as possible, as this will help you make key decisions about club activities later on. For example, if your objective is to raise awareness about microfinance, among what population are you trying to do this? How will you do it? A sample mission statement might be something like "our mission is to create an environment for students, alumni and practitioners to engage in an open dialogue about the microfinance sector, learning more about the current and future trends and organizing activities to promote microfinance as a tool for alleviating poverty both locally and globally."

Brainstorm supporting activities

Once your mission, objectives and strategy are in place, it's time to brainstorm activities that will support these objectives. For example, if education is part of your mission, a panel discussion of microfinance professionals on a specific topic could be organized. If creating career opportunities for members is the main goal, a job fair with local Microfinance Institutions (MFI's) and other Non-governmental Organizations (NGO's) could be planned. Other activities could include:



- Organize a lecture series or panel discussion by inviting prominent professors, researchers and microfinance practitioners to your university.
- Work with university administration to develop and add a course on Microfinance.
- Incorporate microfinance into annual undertakings such as social venture competitions.
- Institutionalize a microfinance course unit into your university's curriculum.
- Encourage research and writing in the areas of microfinance. You can do this by submitting articles to publications such as the World Bank Economic Review (<http://wber.oupjournals.org>), the Journal of Finance (<http://www.afajof.org>) and others. The Financial Access Initiative also welcomes Op Ed submissions on its research topics. Contact Caitlin Weaver at caitlin.weaver@financialaccess.org for more information on the submissions process.
- Reach out to journalism students to coordinate media campaigns, write for the newsletter, and take photographs to create stories.
- Organize a showcase of local microentrepreneurs and their products and services.
- Post a website for your club and link it to as many microfinance resources as possible, including other microfinance clubs. Your club can also be linked to the Financial Access Initiative website.

Take stock of your resource needs

Once activities have been brainstormed, it is important to take stock of the resources (what kinds and how much of them) you'll need to implement these activities. What sort of space will you need? What things will be free and what will your club have to pay for or seek to have donated? Where will these resources (financial and otherwise) come from? Some options are charging a small membership fee, fundraising from outside sources, and seeking in-kind donations. You'll also want to become familiar with your school's system for financing student organizations. How do clubs set up bank accounts? Where will donations go? Who will donation checks be made out to? Who has the power to sign checks? Talk to other student leaders at your school, your advisor, and an administrator to get ideas and advice. And don't forget to the most obvious: explore the funding avenues at your school. Ask your advisor, or meet with the Dean of Students or Activities Director to see if there are ways your club can get access to school funds or resources.

Define roles and action areas

Once you have a general framework consisting of the club's mission, objectives, strategy, activities and a plan for providing resources, the challenge is to make it all happen. Designating action areas and assigning key club members as the primary responsible parties for these areas can make this easier. Examples of these areas include Communications & Public Relations, Fundraising, Event Planning, Membership, etc.



Write a business plan

It's helpful to formalize all the ideas and plans you generate into a concrete business plan. This is a dynamic document that can be changed and improved as the club evolves and it provides a good record for members to refer to, especially if new people come into positions of leadership. The business plan should carefully state your objectives and strategy, as well as include sections that address the following:

- Short and long term goals of the club
- The club's foundation activities and their implementation
- Meeting financial and resource needs
- Organizational structure of the club

Get faculty support

Soliciting the advice and support of a key faculty or staff member (either someone knowledgeable in the area of microfinance or just familiar with the administration of the university) can be helpful in terms of securing administration buy-in, generating publicity and demonstrating to other students that the club is serious about this new venture. It's also often necessary for you to formally apply for your club to be recognized by the university. Try to set up a meeting with key faculty or staff members and introduce the club and see how they can help.

Develop strategic partnerships

It can be helpful to partner with existing clubs with similar objectives both to share best practices and to share the costs/planning burden of events. The Financial Access Initiative (FAI) Student Network is an international network that links students groups around the world. The FAI Student Network provides a platform through which students can share job and internship opportunities, conference planning tips, and training opportunities, and also to build knowledge about and contacts in the microfinance industry. Please contact Caitlin Weaver at caitlin.weaver@financialaccess.org for information on becoming part of the FAI Student Network. There may also be similar clubs at other, neighboring universities with which you can partner. In addition, strategic partnerships with university administration can also be helpful. For example, if the university has a career services office, they could help in organizing and sponsoring a job fair specifically for microfinance and may even have additional important contacts in the industry.

Make technology work for you

If possible, establish a website that, at the minimum, provides a list of activities in which students can get involved and who they should contact. You may also want to consider establishing a listserv or a club profile page on social networking site where members can post articles, job postings and other information in one central location. It is also



helpful to maintain a database of membership information and the information of any MFI's or other outside organizations with which you make contact.

For more information on how your student group can become part of the FAI Student Network, contact Caitlin Weaver at caitlin.weaver@financialaccess.org.