

# THE **NEURODIVERSITY** ALLIANCE



*A community of leaders committed to celebrating neurodiversity and mobilizing for disability justice.*

## Getting Started Guidebook



**CELEBRATING NEURODIVERSITY. ADVOCATING FOR CHANGE.**

# Getting Started Guidebook

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Table of Contents</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Who We Are and What We Do</b>	<b>2 - 6</b>
<b>Getting Started</b>	<b>7 - 8</b>
<b>Developing Mission and Vision Statements</b>	<b>9 - 10</b>
<b>Choosing a Leadership Model</b>	<b>11 - 14</b>
<b>Finding Advisors</b>	<b>15 - 16</b>
<b>Recruiting Members</b>	<b>17 - 18</b>
<b>Creating Goals</b>	<b>19 - 20</b>
<b>Facilitating Meetings</b>	<b>21 - 24</b>
<b>Creating a Calendar</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Tools &amp; Resources</b>	<b>26</b>



# Who We Are and What We Do





## Who We Are

The Neurodiversity Alliance is a national network of student-led clubs committed to celebrating neurodiversity, and mobilizing, organizing, and advocating for disability justice.

## What We Do

The Neurodiversity Alliance empowers young adults to mobilize their communities and create bold solutions that drive positive change. Students launch and lead local clubs, and the Neurodiversity Alliance provides resources, support, and leadership tools for young adults to build community, raise awareness, and engage in advocacy.

At the Neurodiversity Alliance, we envision an equitable and liberatory education system that centers teaching and learning around the individual strengths, needs, and goals of students. We strive for transformative change that centers the vision and leadership of those most impacted by inequitable systems. We embrace an anti-ableist world in which neurodivergent individuals feel seen, heard, and valued, connected in community, and mobilized to act.





*“There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle, because we do not lead single-issue lives.”*

– Audre Lorde



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## We align and organize ourselves in these disability justice principles:



1. **INTERSECTIONALITY** - We all have different experiences of power based on the multi-layered and overlapping identities we bring to the world, including our race, gender, and abilities.
2. **LEADERSHIP OF THOSE MOST IMPACTED** - We elevate the voices of and are guided by the wisdom of those who are most affected by the issues.
3. **ANTI-CAPITALIST POLITIC** - We know that our inherent worth is not based on our production of labor, economic output, or other capitalist principles.
4. **COMMITMENT TO CROSS MOVEMENT ORGANIZING** - We create alliances with other social justice movements to advance equity and justice for all.
5. **RECOGNIZING WHOLENESS** - We believe in the value in each individual and honor the ways they contribute to our world.
6. **SUSTAINABILITY** - We pace ourselves and prioritize self- and collective care to ensure we can continue to fully show up and sustain ourselves long-term.
7. **COMMITMENT TO CROSS-DISABILITY SOLIDARITY** - We honor the insights and wisdom of all of our community members to reach our collective liberation.
8. **INTERDEPENDENCE** - We care for each other to meet our communal needs as we move towards equity and liberation.
9. **COLLECTIVE ACCESS** - We ensure that everyone has access and opportunity to be in community with each other.
10. **COLLECTIVE LIBERATION** - We move together as people with multilayered abilities, class backgrounds, and racial, gender, and sexual identities with a vision that leaves no body/mind behind.

Photo: Multi-ethnic Students Checking A Textbook On Campus by Marko Subotin from NounProject.com





# Guiding Principles

# Getting Started

*Welcome to the Neurodiversity Alliance!*

Congratulations on taking the first steps in launching your club and joining a community of young adult changemakers across the country. This guidebook is a tool to get you started, with information on making your club official, recruiting members, hosting meetings, and more.

## Expectations

In launching your chapter of the Neurodiversity Alliance, you are joining our growing network of clubs across the country that are committed to celebrating neurodiversity and mobilizing for disability justice.

As an official member, your club is committing to:

- Creating a community that welcomes, affirms, and celebrates neurodivergent students
- Deepening your understanding of disability justice
- Advocating for change in your school, community, and nationally through grassroots action, campaigns, and events





# 5 Steps for Launching the Neurodiversity Alliance



## STEP 1: Register your club!

Establish the Neurodiversity Alliance the same way you would establish any other group or club. Look in your Student Handbook or on the school website for the rules at your school. Communicate clearly and openly with administrators about your plan.

## STEP 2: Find an Advisor!

Identify a staff member who has proven to be supportive of neurodiversity and students who learn differently to advise your club. It could be a teacher, counselor, advocate, librarian, or someone in a different role. *Tip: Find co-advisors for extra support.*

## STEP 3: Pick a meeting Place!

Pick a comfortable meeting spot that is easy to find. This could be your advisor's classroom, a library meeting room, or other location. Post signs and posters to help guide people.

## STEP 4: Advertise & Get Food!

Make a plan to advertise at your school. This may be through school bulletin announcements, flyers, social media, word-of-mouth, and more. Also, find a way to provide free food in order to increase attendance!

## STEP 5: Hold Your First Meeting!

Be sure to start every meeting with introductions - name, year, pronouns, etc. At the first meeting, consider starting with a discussion about what drew people to the group and why they feel it's important.

*Feeling stuck?*

*Schedule time with a member of the national team to get support.*

# Developing a Mission Statement

Who are you? What kind of club are you going to be? Create a 1-2 sentence compelling statement that identifies the club's purpose.

Spend some time researching the mission statements of other types of clubs on campus. Every club's mission statement will be specific to their purpose, but these can spark ideas as you create your own. Below is an example adapted from our national Neurodiversity Alliance mission statement.

*The (school name) Neurodiversity Alliance is a student-led club committed to celebrating neurodiversity, and mobilizing, organizing, and advocating for disability justice.*

*Write your mission statement*

The ND Alliance at \_\_\_\_\_(school name)'s mission is: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

# Developing a Vision Statement

What are you working towards? Where are you going? The vision statement sets the direction for the future you want to create. Develop a 1-2 sentence statement that describes your big picture goal.

Below is an example adapted from the national Neurodiversity Alliance vision and values statements.

*Through student-led community building, leadership development, and advocacy, the (school name) Neurodiversity Alliance leads with bold solutions to create an anti-ableist world.*

*Write your vision statement*

The ND Alliance at \_\_\_\_\_(school name)'s vision is: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

# Activity Idea

Try this activity to get ideas when creating the mission and vision statement!

- Gather members, or an interested friend if you don't have members yet.
- Set a timer and brainstorm all the words and phrases that you can think of related to your club's goals, purpose, values, culture, and more. This is open space to dream - BE BOLD!
- Invite everyone to take a couple of minutes to add stars to the words and phrases they think are most important for the mission and vision.
- Pull the words and phrases highlighted onto a new page or flip chart. Take some time to discuss how to pull these together into cohesive mission & vision statements, making sure everyone's voice is heard.
- If you have a large group, it may be helpful to have 1-2 volunteers draft the statement from these words and phrases and then share with the full group for feedback and approval.
- Get agreement from everyone on the final mission and vision statements before sharing and promoting them.



# Choosing an Effective Leadership Model

How will your club's leadership be organized? What will be expected of club members in different roles? How will decisions be made?

These are important considerations in starting your Neurodiversity Alliance club to ensure that:

- There are many pathways for members to take on leadership roles that fit with their unique skills, knowledge, and interests.
- There is shared power and shared responsibility between members.
- All members have an understanding of their role and the roles of others.

There are different models for organizing your Neurodiversity Alliance and creating leadership opportunities. First, you should check if your school policies require a specific type of club and leadership structure. Information can often be found in your student handbook, or at the school activities or counseling offices.

On the following pages there are some examples of leadership structures that can be adapted or combined to fit your club, or you can develop your own model.

In establishing your model, it is very important to think about the longevity of the club. Think through the best practices of having continuous club leadership that does not end when you graduate.



# Choosing an Effective Leadership Model

## ***Shared or Distributed Leadership:***

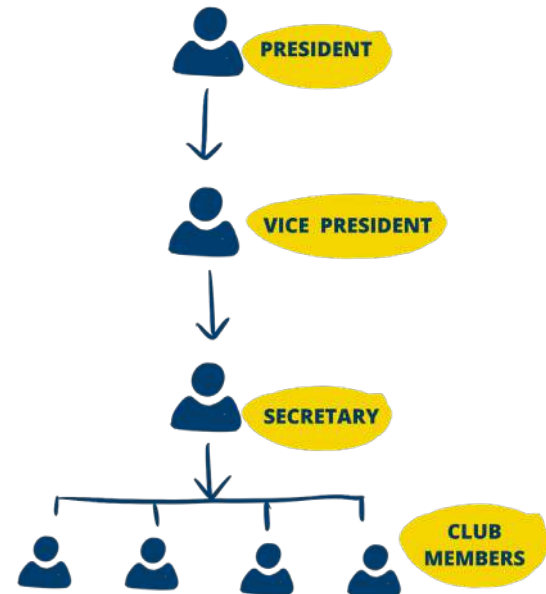
Shared leadership consists of co-leads who have specific roles in guiding and supporting the club. In distributed leadership models, members often opt-in to leading a specific project or using their skills in a particular role (such as being a social media manager or taking meeting notes). This involves a high level of trust and shared ownership and is a common structure in social justice movements.



# Choosing an Effective Leadership Model

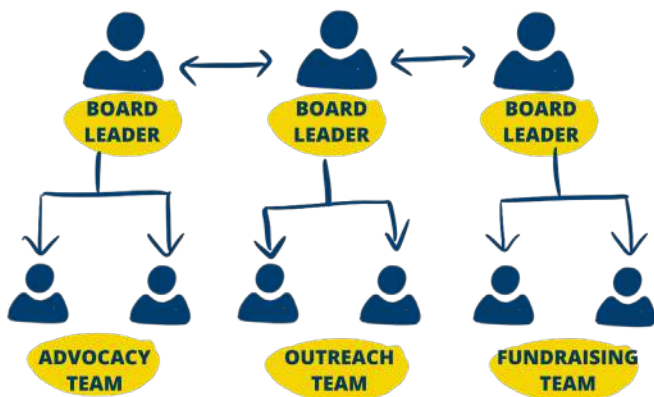
## ***Hierarchy-based Leadership:***

Hierarchy-based Leadership often consists of a President (or Co-Presidents), Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, Senior Advisor, and other fixed roles. Hierarchical structures designate a clear chain of responsibility and are often used in boards or councils.



## ***Board or Team-based Leadership:***

Team-based Leadership consists of a “board” or “team” of people who lead the club. Each member has a defined leadership role that covers major areas of responsibility (Examples: Facilitator, Outreach & Events Coordinator, Advocacy Coordinator, etc.). The leadership roles are well-defined, and the board or team makes decisions collectively and reports to the whole group instead of a President. This model offers a balance - more structured than a Distributed Model, but less structured than a Hierarchical Model.

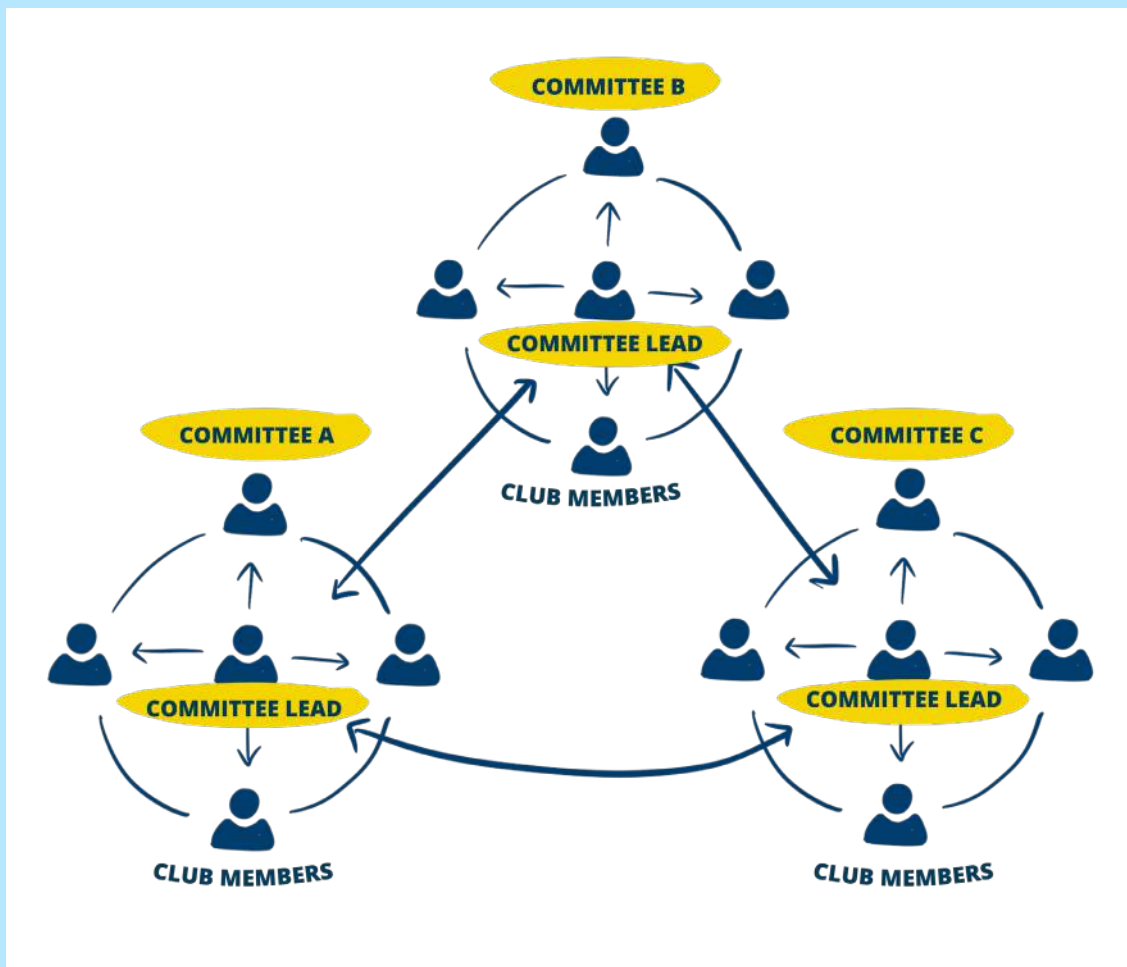




# Choosing an Effective Leadership Model

## ***Committee-based Leadership:***

Specific committees are formed to address goals and are led by committee “chairs” who collaborate together and give individual reports at large-group meetings. Examples include: outreach & events committee, advocacy committee, training & education committee, fundraising committee, social committee, etc. This structure may be effective for larger clubs to allow opportunities for more members to get involved.



# Finding Advisors

## What is a Faculty Advisor?

A Faculty Advisor can be any supportive teacher or staff member who is aligned with the club's mission. An effective Faculty Advisor is an individual who already has a vested interest in neurodiversity and learning differences:

*Faculty advisors are often:*

- A teacher, counselor, or student services staff (at the high school level).
- A faculty member in the psychology, social work, or education department (at the college or university level).
- A staff member at the campus counseling center, health/wellness center, student activities or student support center (high school and college/university)
- An advocate, counselor, or program manager (at a community organization)

In most cases, the Faculty Advisor should be willing to devote a couple of hours a week to the club throughout the planning and launch process, and then provide support as needed on an ongoing basis. Refer to the policies and procedures at your school for specific information about club advisors.



# What Is Required of a Faculty Advisor?

**The Neurodiversity Alliance prides itself on being young adult led.**

However, we acknowledge that staff partnership and support is critical to the success of a Neurodiversity Alliance club.

Faculty Advisors engage in a variety of ways, depending on the desires of the young people leading and the capacity and interest of the Advisor. They may informally serve as a logistics support, advocate, mentor, thought partner, co-conspirator, or other role. This person should be able to walk alongside young people through the highs and lows of taking on a leadership role, forming a club, and designing activities in the school to build community, support and awareness for students who learn differently.

***Common areas that student club leaders need support are:***

- Getting approval from school to be a registered club
- Securing a space for club meetings
- Being a liaison between the leaders and school administration



# Member Recruitment

Consider how you will recruit a diverse membership that is truly representative of multiple identities of neurodivergent students at your school. The Neurodiversity Alliance does not require clubs to have a minimum member requirement, but we recommend at least 5 consistent members.

We encourage all clubs to have a focus on growth, both in membership size and level of engagement. In some cases, you may be required to have a minimum number of club members to be recognized as a club at your school. Be sure to check with your school or campus club advisor for start-up requirements.

## Roles:

Engaged members are essential to your club's success, regardless of whether they have the time or interest in taking on formal leadership roles. These members may embrace other roles in the future when they feel a sense of connectedness to the mission. Regardless of role, all members can:

- Contribute fresh ideas
- Share the club's mission and overall message
- Participate in club activities and invite others
- Spread the word about events and campaigns

## How to Recruit:

1. Work with your club advisors and/or leadership to develop a recruitment plan and timeline for blast emails and social media posts.
2. Select the strategies and activities you will use in your recruitment plan. Refer to the list on the following page for ideas.
3. Register your members by adding them to the club member log. By listing their name and contact information, you are enrolling them as an official member.

## Practical Tips:

1. Keep paper copies of fliers on-hand and be ready to post when the opportunity arises—for example, at a local coffee shop or gym.
2. Keep digital copies of the fliers on members' phones so they can easily text or email it to prospective members.
3. Ensure that contact information is consistent across all marketing materials, so interested students know how they can reach you.

# Recruitment Activities

In addition to working with your club advisors to share email and social media blasts, take steps to advertise through other channels. Consider how students get information on campus. Below are some ideas for recruiting club members:

- Take out an ad in your school newspaper, weekly flyer, or newsletter.
- Post flyers throughout campus—not only in the classrooms and halls, but also at places where students tend to gather or spend time waiting, like the dining hall or health center.
- Make sure your club is listed on your school's student organizations webpage.
- Send recruitment emails to all students at your school.
- Talk to your teachers and counselors about the club and ask them to share the information. Remember to leave them with a few flyers to distribute.
- Present your club and its mission in front of your class, school, or community center. Engage your audience by telling them why you were inspired to start the club, then invite them to join.
- Partner with other clubs on campus to help recruit members. Highlight the benefits and similarities of your club, and how members can be involved in both clubs.
- Organize a recruitment event on campus or post up at an existing event to share information.
- Set up a booth, host a pizza night, or meet in a cafe. Present the details of your club, leave plenty of time for questions, and share enrollment materials

**CLICK TO**  
**CREATE YOUR OWN**  
**RECRUITMENT FLIER**

Remember to emphasize that your club is open to neurodivergent students and allies. This work centers the leadership of neurodivergent students, but it's important to share that all who align with our mission are welcome to join!



# Creating Goals

What does your club want to accomplish this year? When creating your club goals, consider the ways you will incorporate the three Neurodiversity Alliance core pillars of Community, Leadership, and Advocacy.

*“Understanding disability and ableism is the work of every revolutionary, activist and organizer - of every human being.”*

**- Mia Mingus, writer and community organizer for Transformative Justice and Disability Justice**

**Community** involves providing a comfortable, inclusive space for neurodivergent students to share successes & challenges, and access peer support and information. Building a supportive community enables students to gain important connections, resources, and skills they can use now and in the future.

**Leadership** focuses on providing opportunities and support for neurodivergent students to identify and use their strengths, gain new skills, expand their networks, and propel others through a culture of peer mentorship.

**Advocacy** means educating students, teachers, families, and the community to create a safer, more equitable, and accepting environment. This may involve working to change unjust school rules, as well as local & national policies, in addition to training staff, students, and community members to understand and end discrimination and stigma.



# Activity Idea

Try this activity to get ideas when creating goals for your club.

- Start with a group brainstorm using a flipchart, whiteboard, or online sticky note board.
- Invite members to rank ideas by starring the ideas they want to prioritize.
- Discuss the starred ideas and come to agreement on goals.
- Sharpen them into SMART goals by making sure you can answer the following questions for each goal.

KEY QUESTIONS	ANSWERS
What goal do we want to accomplish?	
How will we know we have met this goal?	
What action steps are needed?	
Who will be responsible? Who else will collaborate or support?	
When will we get this done?	

- Write this down (on paper, using a shared online document, or using tools such as Padlet, Miro, Jamboard, etc.) and keep these easily available and use them to guide your club. Check in on goals often as a group to celebrate successes and address any challenges.
- Here is an [Action Planning Template](#) you can use or adapt if you choose.

# Facilitating Meetings

Being prepared for your meeting is key! Before you create a meeting agenda, consider these items:

## **How are you going to communicate with club members?**

Find the best way to communicate with students at your school. It may be a combination of school bulletin announcements, flyers, social media, group text, email, and word-of-mouth.

## **How often will you meet and where?**

Most clubs meet on a weekly or bi-weekly basis. Find out if your school already has times for student groups to meet regularly. If not, consider before or after school, or during lunch.

### **Tips:**

- Send out a poll to see when most people are available.
- Decide on a time that most people can attend and send a calendar invitation to everyone's email.
- Pick a meeting spot that students can easily find, such as your advisor's classroom or a meeting room in the library.
- Post flyers and other posters to help people find you.
- Keep it at the same day and time so that the meeting becomes routine for members.



# Facilitating Meetings



## **What community agreements will you establish within the club?**

Community agreements help ensure that there is an understanding of what each person needs, and can commit to, in order for there to be safety, support, and trust within the group. Establishing the club community agreements should be a group process involving all club members. Consider posting community agreements in the space for each meeting or including them on meeting agendas. Reflect on, discuss, and leave space to adapt these often so they become part of the club culture. [This resource](#) from the National Equity Project can guide you in creating community agreements.

## **Here are a few examples of community agreements to get started:**

- We are open to hearing new ideas and are authentic in sharing our own.
- We take space to share and make space for others to shine.
- We listen deeply and ask questions to understand.
- We practice cultural humility, knowing that we all have different identities, experiences, values, and backgrounds.
- We respect confidentiality and ensure that “stories stay, lessons leave”.
- We take care of ourselves and our community, including repairing harm when we make mistakes.
- We have fun and create spaces of joy.

# Facilitating Meetings

*“Creating space to tell disability stories is a way that we remake the world.”*

– Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, Queer disabled femme writer, organizer, educator, and performance artist.

## **What expectations will there be of club members?**

Determine if there will be any core requirements of members, such as attending a certain number of meetings or events, or responding to communications. Choose these carefully so as not to create unnecessary barriers and communicate them clearly to members.

*[Tip: Make sure members share in the club’s success! In an effective club, all members adopt and share a ‘we’re in this together’ attitude. Foster a supportive community and fuel members’ passion by recognizing those that bring forth ideas and who take on extra responsibilities. Celebrate each goal you meet and uplift the contributions of members to keep everyone actively engaged.]*



# Facilitating Meetings

## How will you add joy and fun to the club?

Consider how you will keep members engaged long-term and draw others to your club. In addition, identify ways to engage the broader community through events and campaigns.

- Provide free food!
- Invite guest speakers.
- Engage members in meetings through collaborative activities. Consider using small groups, moving around the space adding to sticky note charts, hosting peer skill-share times, and more.
- Make time for icebreakers and team building.
- Host a [self-care](#) & [collective care](#) share session (What tools and strategies do members use?).
- Use technology tools such as [Miro](#) or [Jamboard](#), [Kahoot games](#), and [Padlet](#) for virtual engagement.
- Incorporate music and videos. Invite members to contribute to a club playlist.
- Plan informal times to hang out and get to know one another without a set agenda.
- Take advantage of social media. Members can make videos/reels, share quotes, promote events, and more.

**CLICK TO  
VIEW MEETING  
TEMPLATE**

# Creating a Calendar

Creating a club calendar allows members and the broader community to know about upcoming events and opportunities, and stay connected to your Neurodiversity Alliance club. It also provides a space for group planning to ensure that activities are coordinated and not overlapping.

## TIP:

Use your club goals as a resource in creating your calendar. Add action steps, deadlines, events, and other important information.

**Below is a sample calendar that you could adapt or add your own details:**

<i>August</i>	<i>September</i>	<i>October</i>	<i>November</i>	<i>December</i>	<i>January</i>
Monthly 1:1	Monthly 1:1	Monthly 1:1	Monthly 1:1	Monthly 1:1	Monthly 1:1
Young Leader Organizing Institute	Monthly National Leader Convening	Monthly Leader Convening	Monthly Leader Convening	Monthly Leader Convening	Monthly Leader Convening
Weekly Club Meetings	Receive Welcome Kit	LD Awareness & Advocacy Month Campaign	Weekly Club Meetings	Weekly Club Meetings	Weekly Club Meetings
	Weekly Club Meetings	Weekly Club Meetings			
<i>February</i>	<i>March</i>	<i>April</i>	<i>May</i>	<i>June</i>	<i>July</i>
Monthly 1:1	Monthly 1:1	Monthly 1:1	Monthly 1:1	Monthly 1:1	Monthly 1:1
Monthly Leader Convening	Monthly Leader Convening	Monthly Leader Convening	Monthly Leader Convening	LD Day of Action	Monthly Leader Convening
Strike Out Stigma Campaign	College and Career Readiness Campaign	Weekly Club Meetings	End of Year Celebration	Weekly Club Meetings	Weekly Club Meetings
Weekly Club Meetings	Weekly Club Meetings		Weekly Club Meetings		

# Tools and Resources

Congratulations on a successful Neurodiversity Alliance Club launch! You are joining a committed community of neurodivergent young adults and allies across the country. We invite you to contribute your unique strengths and talents, and access support as needed in your journey.

This guidebook is an evolving resource for launching a successful Neurodiversity Alliance Club. We will continue to update it with new information, club spotlights, and co-created materials.

## TOOLS:

- [Iceberg Activity](#): A 45-50 minute activity to reflect on current barriers and challenges.
- [Member Log Template](#): A printable attendance log
- [Pyramid of Engagement Activity](#): A 30 minute activity to identify entry points and engagement pathways in movement building.
- [Customizable recruitment flier template](#): An editable flier available in Canva, a free, web-based, graphic design tool.
- [The ND Alliance Meeting Template](#): A blank meeting agenda template.

**[CLICK FOR MEMBER LOG TEMPLATE](#)**

## Contact Information

Email: [info@thendalliance.org](mailto:info@thendalliance.org)

Website: <https://thendalliance.org/>



ND Alliance Website