



STARTING AN LSCA CHAPTER

We're excited you are interested in launching a chapter of Law Students for Climate Accountability (LSCA) on your campus! This toolkit contains an overview of LSCA and a guide to starting a chapter. We can also provide drafts of bylaws or a constitution, if helpful for you. Please get in touch with questions at any time! You can reach out at info@ls4ca.org. We are happy to schedule individual meetings to help you think through campus-specific issues.

VISION AND PURPOSE

Law firms claim to be neutral actors while profiting from and perpetuating climate inequities. A lack of transparency and accountability allows firms to hide these immense harms while shifting the costs to frontline communities. LSCA activates and mobilizes the power of law students to transform the legal industry's role from exacerbating climate injustice to meaningfully supporting a just transition. We aspire to move legal ethics and practice towards a just transition for our climate, in solidarity with frontline communities, to build an equitable and sustainable world in our lifetimes.

As a group of young law students and lawyers, LSCA is uniquely poised to shape the reputation and labor market of law firms. We combine innovative research and student organizing to:

1. **Start the conversation:** Expose work that law firms do for the fossil fuel industry and make it a morally controversial issue;
2. **Engage law students & lawyers:** Build organizing power across the legal industry;
3. **Change the legal industry:** Leverage research, media, and people power to push law firms to commit to ethical standards for their work and, ultimately, phase out fossil fuel-enabling work and commit to climate justice work.



LSCA'S HISTORY

Law Students for Climate Accountability was founded in 2020 by a small group of students at Yale Law School who were inspired by the #DropExxon protests against the law firm Paul, Weiss. After receiving national attention for developing the first [Law Firm Climate Change Scorecard](#), the initial group built an organization of law students across the country dedicated to changing the role the legal profession plays in the climate crisis.

When future generations look back at the origins of the climate crisis, they will see that too many law firms were on the wrong side of history. Law firms constitute an indispensable pillar of support for the fossil fuel industry. When fossil fuel companies want to build new pipelines and refineries, law firms write the contracts, advise the project financing, lobby public officials to roll back environmental regulations, and defend fossil fuel companies in court. LSCA's co-founders recognized that it is past time for law firms to face their integral role in exacerbating climate change and commit to phasing out representation of the fossil fuel industry.

We aim to build a legal industry committed to a just, livable future. It is not enough for law firms and the legal industry to divest their labor from the fossil fuel industry. We must focus on reinvestment in communities that have been harmed by the fossil fuel industry and climate change. Law firms and the legal industry should pledge to take action to address the climate crisis and promote climate justice. We further call on law firms and the legal industry to provide legal services to Black, Indigenous, and low-income communities fighting for climate justice — in addition to ceasing their work for fossil fuel industry clients that perpetuate environmental injustice.



A GROWING MOVEMENT

Since our launch, LSCA has undergone tremendous growth, and we have found a number of supporters for our work. Since the 2023-24 school year, our U.S. campaigns have been led by eight student members that make up our [National Leadership Committee](#), each of whom is part of a pair responsible for a particular area of our work. LSCA's national leadership operates according to [bylaws adopted in June 2022](#). Students at a growing number of campuses have chosen to create their own chapters that give their peers the chance to build institutional knowledge, host engaging events, and collectively develop tactics to push the profession toward climate justice. **Although chapters may draft their own constitutions and bylaws, we strongly encourage the use of consensus-building, and that emphasis has been built into the national bylaws.** Because sustainable student organizing is difficult given that students face a number of demands on their time as well as a third of their peers graduating each year, we have sought additional help for our committee and chapters.

After a thorough search for a fiscal sponsor that could provide administrative support, LSCA became a project of Earth Island Institute (EII) in September 2022. Joining EII's group of over 80 projects has given LSCA the ability to support staff, and at that time we welcomed our first-ever U.S. National Director, Haley Czarnek. Haley is happy to support both existing and developing chapters and can be reached at haley@ls4ca.org. In July of this year, LSCA welcomed Assistant Director Ka'sha Bernard, and we are looking forward to hiring an International Director to support our growing international work.

At present, LSCA has an eight-person U.K. National Committee that uses the same co-chair structure as the U.S. team. We have recently launched our first U.K. chapter at BPP University. Students in Australia, Canada, Germany, and South Africa are also working to develop methodologies for their own research.

Now that we have built an extensive network of support, we are thrilled to be in the position to support developing chapters, and can't wait to see what you bring to this movement.



GETTING A CHAPTER STARTED

Sometimes, getting off the ground can be as easy as recruiting your friends. Have conversations about the climate with your peers and invite them to work together; you can call a meeting when there are a few folks on board. As you build your initial group of students, keep in mind that LSCA is for any law student interested in tackling climate change. While many of our students choose a public interest path, we value students interested in joining a firm after law school. These students have great insights on the recruiting process and firm structure.

Ideally, a successful first meeting will help you identify the group's priorities and work towards your first event. However, don't be afraid to take more time if you don't identify your goals right away. This is where one-on-ones become very helpful. **Taking the time to build trust and get to know each other personally will create a strong foundation.** It's also likely to spur ideas and generative conversations. Try to identify ideas that are exciting to your group, and then make a list of the tasks you can complete to implement those ideas. Determine who is willing to take them on, and don't be afraid to ask people to help. You might choose to have people work as pairs, to create both support and accountability.

Whatever you identify as your priorities for the year, the heart of sustainable student organizing is keeping up-to-date lists of members, engaging with them regularly, and training new leaders for the next year. As a result, we ask chapters to complete a [registration form](#) with current members' information, and to provide updated contacts at the end of the spring so we can continue to support organizing on your campus year after year. We also ask chapters to [designate a campus representative](#) who is responsible for sharing information from the national body with students at their university. Students may also choose to select a representative from each class year.



WHAT KIND OF WORK CAN CHAPTERS TAKE ON?

Projects are at the chapter's discretion, but could include:

- Organizing protests at on-campus interviewing (OCI) / firm events on campus
- Taking on regional research projects to illustrate the effects of extractive industry on local communities in a [Legal Legacies piece](#)
- Writing op-eds about fossil fuel work for local outlets and campus newspapers
- Asking students to [sign LSCA's petition](#)
- Hosting lunch events around specific discussion topics or featuring speakers from alternative legal careers or “A” firms
- Working to change campus culture, including by asking administration and career services to include information about climate work and to provide additional support for students seeking jobs outside of corporate law
- Collaborating with other student organizations (e.g. affinity groups, environmental law societies, NLG/ACS, etc.) to host panels or other events
- There's never a bad time to hold a screening party to watch Erin Brockovich or your favorite climate-related movie or documentary!



ORGANIZING MODEL

We want to change the culture of the legal profession. That starts with being intentional about the culture we build internally. We aim to hold ourselves to the [principles of environmental justice](#) and to practice consensus building. We organize relationally, striving to understand what brings our colleagues to the work and how we can support each other. Building trust is crucial to creating a supportive chapter structure, particularly given that the law school environment encourages students to compete with each other and to approach problems individualistically.

One-on-one conversations are among the most useful tools in the organizer's toolkit. They can be used for recruitment, relationship-building, and/or deepening a student's engagement after recruitment. They are most effective when the purpose is clear and the organizer spends most of the time listening. Face-to-face conversations are typically the best way to build relationships, but Zoom is a great substitute when you can't meet in person. It is helpful to have some questions you'd like to ask about how the student became interested in climate work. Although you may have a clear ask for them at the end if they seem interested in joining or taking on more responsibility, the primary focus should be on getting to know the student.



DECISION-MAKING AND SHARED LEADERSHIP

In group settings, we apply relational principles by creating and abiding by group agreements, employing consensus-building, and making space for varying viewpoints. For all chapter decisions, as permitted by the urgency of the situation, members should seek to ensure ample time for discussions, refining proposals, and building consensus prior to proceeding to a vote. Note also that many situations that feel urgent can be avoided by working proactively, rather than reactively. It is easy to get steered off course by acting too quickly and without sufficient input; building in time for thoughtful discussion is almost always worth it. Chapters may determine what decisions require a formal vote in their bylaws or Constitution.

At the national level, student leaders utilize a two-step voting process to evaluate consensus that chapters may consider adopting. When a student has made a proposal and would like group buy-in, approval, or support, they may ask for a vote. In the first round of voting, members can vote “yes” via thumbs up, “no” via thumbs down, or request more discussion/information via thumbs sideways. This quickly identifies where clear consensus exists. If there is not consensus, the students who were not “yes” votes should be asked to share more. Once each person has shared their thoughts, members can discuss further as necessary until they are ready for the second round of voting. In the second round, members use “[Fist to Five](#),” indicating a hard no with a fist and full support with five fingers. The proposal is considered to have passed if it receives a 3-5 from at least 80% of the body, although members should consider further discussion if support is not strong (e.g. most “yes” votes are threes, or multiple people are ones).

While this process has worked well for the national committee, we welcome chapters to experiment with what works best for their group to build consensus and create space for all voices.



OUR NETWORK

Currently, students are organizing at:

- Brooklyn
- Fordham
- Georgetown
- Harvard
- Lewis and Clark
- NYU
- Pace
- Stanford
- UC Berkeley
- UC Davis
- UCLA
- Virginia
- Yale

National Student Leadership

We are committed to keeping current students at the center of our work; as a result, our National Leadership Committees are made up of law students and are responsible for the strategy of the organization, supported by the staff Directors. The committees coordinate different parts of our work at the national level, and students interested in particular projects should feel free to reach out to info@ls4ca.org to get connected to national leadership. You can find the full list of current committee members [here](#).

We anticipate applications for the next leadership committee opening in February of next year; anyone who will be enrolled at an ABA law school in the 2025-26 academic year is eligible to apply.



FAQs

Do chapters have to be official student organizations registered with their school?

- Student leaders are in the best position to decide if registration is the best model; we work with some students who are creating registered organizations, and others who are not.
- At some campuses, students have found it makes the most sense to work within an existing organization; for instance, your Environmental Law Society may be excited to expand their activities, and willing to designate a Board member to serve as a campus representative.

How can chapters get funding?

- LSCA has access to limited funds on the national level and will strive to support chapter projects that further our mission. You may also choose to organize officially, which typically comes with access to a small amount of funding from your school.

What is the best way to structure chapter leadership in a non-hierarchical way?

- Most students will be familiar with traditional hierarchical structures (i.e. an Executive Board comprising a President, Vice President, Treasurer, and Secretary). While this model can help clarify roles, it can also create organizations that are top-heavy, and may not encourage the widest array of perspectives. Note that some universities may require this structure in order to officially register an organization. If that is the case, you may consider organizing unofficially, or spending some time collectively discussing how to fully involve members.
- For this reason, we recommend taking a different approach. Experimentation is welcome! You may not find the perfect arrangement the first time, but we believe it is worth it to develop shared leadership and practice the consensus-building we will need to build a legal profession centered on justice, rather than competition.
- A few suggestions: a body that is too large will face difficulties parsing out different elements of the work (on top of difficulties with scheduling and consensus-building). We recommend keeping your leadership body between 4-8 members. Each member should have a clear role that they feel ownership over; be cautious that one person does not own too much of the work.. It may be helpful to build roles around members' interests and skills. Additionally, it's helpful to have someone who can serve as a facilitator, process-watcher, or even just as a vibe-checker. Proactively checking in with people who are quiet, for instance, is a useful practice.



LAW STUDENTS *for* CLIMATE ACCOUNTABILITY

How can students participate if they are not ready to start a chapter?

- In addition to serving as a campus representative, we are happy to connect for individual conversations about what may be possible in your region. If we know of organizers at nearby schools, for instance, we can help connect people across campuses. There may also be opportunities to connect with student organizations that already exist to co-host relevant events. Please get in touch at info@ls4ca.org with any questions!