

How to Start (and Sustain) a Food Law Society

If you are reading this, you are considering starting a Food Law Society at your law school. Congratulations! Although the process can seem overwhelming and intimidating at times, you are taking an important step towards building a food law community at your school. This guide will help you through the process and contains lots of tips and suggestions from students who have been in your shoes. It also contains helpful hints to sustain your society once it gets going.

Step 1: Brainstorm and gauge interest

1. Questions to consider when deciding whether to develop a new food law organization/society at your school:

- a. With a clear and specific scope, what do we want the food law organization to do?
- b. What is the organization's mission, and how does the mission relate to the organization's purpose? (Draft a mission statement and purpose.)
 - i. **Mission statement.** Express your organization's goals and purpose. Below we've provided the mission statement from the National Food Law Student Network (the "FLSN") to get you started. This mission statement is simply meant to be an example. It may be broader in scope than your organization's mission so feel free to tailor it as you see fit or come up with something totally different, given your law school's audience and needs.

FLSN's Mission Statement:

Motivated by a shared desire to improve the food system, FLSN raises law student voices in the national conversation about our food system. FLSN serves as a hub to exchange ideas, knowledge, and practical skills, while building enduring connections among students and professionals to support the next generation of food law and policy advocates.

FLSN fulfills this mission by:

1. *Hosting regional and national events, including the Food Law Student Leadership Summit;*
2. *Providing guidance and resources for students to promote food policy at their schools;*
3. *Connecting students to unique food law and policy projects through the Network and our partners;*
4. *Serving as a liaison between students and professionals in order to cultivate mentoring relationships; and*
5. *Curating a clearinghouse of funding, internship, and employment opportunities.*

- c. What activities would further that purpose? (Describe anticipated activities in a realistic way.)
- d. How will we collect the necessary resources to support these activities? (Consider funds, space, staff support, and oversight.)
- e. Who is your target student and legal audience, and why would they want to be involved with this organization? (Is there a big enough interest in food law to start a food law

organization at this time, or might it make more sense to increase awareness and interest in other ways?)

****If after answering the above questions, it doesn't seem like developing a new food law organization/society is a good fit for your school at this time, here are some alternatives:**

- a. Ask other existing student organizations if they would be willing to have a food law subcommittee (ex Health Law, Environmental Law, Animal Law)
 - b. Ask other existing student organizations if they would be willing to host a one-time food law-related event
 - c. Stay connected to other food law-inclined students at other schools through the FLSN (and social media, etc)
- 2. Circulate a petition stating the purpose and mission.**
- a. Get as many signatures as you can from students and other target audience members affirming interest in a food law organization
 - i. Tips on how to get as many signatures as possible
 1. Frame the new food law organization as one that intersects with other areas of the law that may be of interest to your fellow classmates (eg. agriculture, environmental, regulatory, labor, health, international law, children, or family law (food security), etc.).
 2. Bring the petition with you to class and talk with students about the new food law organization while you wait for class to start.
 3. Set up a table with light snacks in a heavily trafficked area on campus to provide information about the organization.
 - b. Try to get signatures from students in each class level, and don't forget to reach out to professors and other members of your school too.
 - i. If your law school is connected to a broader university (undergrad, other graduate programs, etc.), consider reaching out to members of those programs as well.
 - c. If you get a substantial number of signatures, and you feel there is significant interest in a new food law organization, move on to the next step.

Step 2: Follow protocol and officially establish your new food law organization

1. Each school has its own process for establishing new organizations, so be sure to take all of the necessary steps required to officially register. Here are some items to keep in mind:
 - a. With whom do you need to register?
 - i. Identify the body empowered with recognizing and overseeing new student organizations. Often this will be your school's Office for Campus Life, Student Bar Association ("SBA"), or equivalent.
 - ii. *Note: At the University of Virginia School of Law, student organizations are required to register not only with the law school, but also register and get approval from the main University of Virginia.
 - b. Do you need to apply separately for funding?
 - c. Is registration only available at certain times of the year? Are there deadlines for registration and funding?
 - d. What is required to register a new student organization?
 - i. New student organizations are typically required to provide a statement of interest, mission statement, constitution, etc. and satisfy certain eligibility criteria, such as a student membership minimum.
 - ii. Also, you may need a faculty advisor.

1. *Note: Even if you are not required to have a faculty advisor, we suggest trying to find one anyway as a continued source of support, ideas, and connections.

Step 3: Host Meetings, Events, and other Programming

1. Meeting ideas:
 - a. Intro meeting at the beginning of the Fall semester to introduce your organization to new students and plan for the upcoming year
 - b. Weekly meetings that highlight a food-law related issue in the news
2. Event ideas:
 - a. Host meet and greets at bars or restaurants near your school to get to know interested students
 - b. Co-sponsor events with other student orgs in food law related areas (environmental, agriculture, animal, health, business, public policy)
 - i. *Note: The University of Virginia School of Law's food law organization (Food Law At Virginia Association, or FLAVA) co-hosted an event with UVA's jewish and muslim organizations related to food laws in religions, namely Kosher and Halal practices. It was very well received!
 - c. Brown bag lunches or "Lunch and Learn" events with professors that teach subjects related to food law—such as environmental law, agriculture law, health law, business law, labor law
 - i. Don't be afraid to think outside of the law professor bubble! Look to professors that teach other graduate-level courses at different schools under your university's umbrella such as the school of public policy, business, etc.
 - d. Jobs/Networking:
 - i. Career Panels:
 1. U.S. Department of Agriculture ("USDA") & The Food and Drug Administration ("FDA") field offices located within your state
 2. Law firms
 3. Bar Associations
 4. Food non-profits, policy organizations, or councils
 5. Food and beverage corporations in-house counsels
 6. Reach out to your career center/services to create alumni connections
 7. Check with The Academy of Food Law and Policy to discover members in your area
 - ii. 1L/2L Summer Jobs Panel
 1. Co-sponsor with health law, agriculture law orgs, or your career services office.
 - e. Feed yourself workshops: teach students how to grow food from almost anywhere (your apartment window, balcony, etc.) and how they can get started.
3. Programming ideas:
 - a. Dig into a small issue—such as campus food waste, campus food system, or recycling—to rally students around and then use the resulting momentum to tackle larger issues.
 - b. Field Trips
 - i. Visit local food startup incubators, such as community kitchens.
 - ii. Visit local farms, urban gardens, vertical farms, farmers markets.
 - iii. Food tastings: orchards, breweries, or coffee houses

- iv. Cooking class: student body exercises and great way to learn quick, easy, and healthy recipes. Don't be afraid to invite local Bar Associations and firms to spread healthy word and increase networking opportunities.
 - c. Build a campus garden while discussing the campus food system.
 - d. Holiday-related programming:
 - i. Host a food drive (around Thanksgiving) and or Thanksgiving Dinner
 1. *Note: *Note: The University of Virginia School of Law's food law organization (Food Law At Virginia Association, or FLAVA) hosted a Thanksgiving Dinner for those who weren't able to go home for Thanksgiving. Attendees included many LLM and international students who had never experienced an American Thanksgiving!
 - ii. Table about fair trade chocolate (and fair trade generally) on Valentine's Day.
 - iii. Movie screenings
 1. Movie ideas:
 - a. The Game Changers (documentary about meat, protein, and strength)
 - e. Host a book club
 - i. *Note: You might have the most success if you pick a book before a Break, such as Fall Break, Winter Break, or Spring Break, and then have a discussion about it afterwards. Also, consider choosing an article or two instead of an entire book if you feel students will be turned off by the idea of having to read an entire book in addition to regular course work.
 - f. Host a cooking class
 - g. Support short-term pro bono projects
 - i. For example, at Duke, the Food Law Society (FLS) partnered with the Environmental Law Society and now have a group of 1Ls/2Ls working on a short research paper regarding biogas initiatives related to hog farming in North Carolina!
4. Other:
- a. Be sure to participate in any school-wide events, such as student activities fairs to advertise your organization

Step 4: Develop resources for your members

- Keep a list of alumni (whether or not they have gone into a career in food law)
- Set up a mentor-mentee program among current students
 - *Note: If funding allows, consider reimbursing students for coffee they spend on a coffee date to encourage mentors and mentees to meet up and get to know each other
- Keep a list of various job paths students can take if they want to pursue a career in food law
 - Firms: which firms specialize in food law?
 - Government: FDA, USDA, EPA
 - Non-profits
 - International opportunities

Step 5: Keep in Touch + Show Us What You've Done!

- Blog about your start-up experience on the FLSN Blog. Send your submission to foodlawstudentnetwork@gmail.com.
- Once you are up and running, share photos and stories of your successful events by sending them to the FLSN at foodlawstudentnetwork@gmail.com.

- Join the FLSN at the Food Law Student Leadership Summit. Check out the [FLSN website](#) for information about the next summit!

Issues and how to problem-solve

Issue 1: Low attendance

Everyone seemed super enthusiastic about the new Food Law Organization when you were first asking around, but now it seems that everyone is busy, preoccupied, etc. and not many people are coming to your events! Here are some suggestions:

1. **Collaborative meetings.** Try to reserve the first 5 minutes of a meeting with another organization to let others know about, or remind people about, your organization.

Issue 2: Lack of funding

Money, money, money. Sigh. What to do when you have lots of great ideas for events and other programming, but no money to implement them? Funding for student organizations is different at every law school. To start, visit your school's Office of Campus Life or SBA to familiarize yourself with your school's requirements and to inquire about how funding is allocated amongst the organizations. Plus:

1. **Collaborative meetings.** Try to co-host an event with an organization with overlapping interests.
 - a. Ask the environmental law and animal law organizations to co-host an event related to the environmental impacts of animal agriculture.
 - b. Ask the health law and constitutional law organizations to co-host an event related to food labeling and a food producer's right to free speech.
2. **Professor talks.** Look to your school's own faculty for speakers, instead of potentially having to reimburse outside speakers for travel.
3. **Law Firms.** Reach out to law firms, especially those specializing in food law or policy-related issues, to see if they would be willing to sponsor an event, whether that be by having their attorneys come for an informational panel or simply donating money to your organization to host something of your own choosing. Most are more than willing to reach students this way.
4. Still looking for more ideas? Check out this FLSN blog post: [What to do When Your Food Law Society Doesn't Get Funding](#).

Thanks for reading through this "How-To" Guide! We hope it helps you as you start (and sustain) your Food Law Society. As always, please remember that FLSN is always here to help along the way. If you run into issues that this Guide hasn't addressed, please contact us. And, of course, let us know about your successes as well!