

# **Locals Organizing Manual Massachusetts Green Party**

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# **A step-by-step Guide to forming a Green-Rainbow local chapter**

## **We're having a Party, and you're invited!**

This Guide is to help you start a local chapter of the Green-Rainbow Party (which is the new name of the Massachusetts Green Party). The local chapters are needed to transform the Party into an increasingly influential voice and an effective political power across Massachusetts. Grassroots political activism is the heart of the Party, and it takes place at the local level.

A local chapter is where people get together to talk about issues, enroll members, decide on important courses of political and social action, and then hit the streets. Locals can staff tables to distribute educational information, gather signatures for petitions and candidates, help identify candidates for office, support candidates and ballot questions, write letters-to-the-editor and op-ed columns for local papers, hold public speak-outs, meetings, and an annual convention, and — under strictly defined rules — raise funds and solicit in-kind donations for electoral and ballot campaigns. Good times and great satisfaction are expected to be part of the experience!

## **Registered members vs. supporting members**

As far as the Commonwealth of Massachusetts is concerned, members of the Green-Rainbow Party (GRP) are people who have registered in their towns as Green-Rainbow voters (formerly as Mass Green voters before the name change). In this guide, we call these *registered* Party members.

To broaden its base, however, the GRP is open to all residents of Massachusetts who:

- Are registered as “Unenrolled” (often referred to as “independent”), or in the political designations Green Party USA or Rainbow Coalition Party.
- Are not registered to vote because they are prohibited for such reasons as age, foreign citizenship, or criminal record.
- Fill out a Party membership form and are asked to pay modest annual dues (which can be reduced or waived if needed).

In short, you may not be registered in another political party (Democratic, Republican, Libertarian) or political designation (minor parties which haven't achieved ballot status). In this guide, we call these *supporting* members.

## **Green-Rainbow Political Committees vs. Clubs**

Similar to different levels of membership, the Green-Rainbow Party certifies two levels of local chapters. As an official political party in Massachusetts, the Party is eager to establish officially recognized Ward/Town/City Political Committees throughout the State. Such committees are geographically based (by ward, city, or town) and need to be very careful about meeting the State's legal requirements.

As a first step, however, a local group will find it quicker and easier to set up a local Green-Rainbow Club, which is a function of the Party and not expressly regulated or recognized by state law.

## **From Club to Political Committee**

PLEASE READ CAREFULLY. The key difference between a Club and a Political Committee — one that can have significant impact on the GRP's legal and financial status — is the raising and dispensing of funds (including even such in-kind contributions

as copying fliers or petitions) for electoral or ballot campaigns and the required procedures for reporting these activities to the State and the IRS.

If a Club chooses to collect money or make in-kind contributions for political purposes, it may do so **ONLY** in the name of an established Political Committee such as the GRP State Committee, a Candidate Committee, or a Ballot Question Committee. Any money the Club collects must be made payable to the Committee in question.

In contrast, a Ward/Town/City Political Committee must have its own treasurer and *is responsible directly* to the State for reporting the funds it decides to collect and spend for political purposes. One advantage of a Political Committee is that it has considerably more discretion than a Club in collecting and disbursing funds. The Secretary and Membership Director of the GRP will help ward/town/city Political Committees learn about this information and associated procedures. You can reach them at: [secretary@massgreens.org](mailto:secretary@massgreens.org) or [membership.director@massgreens.org](mailto:membership.director@massgreens.org).

See the list at the end of this Guide for resources and websites that provide more detailed information. In brief, the differences between Clubs and Political Committees are as follows:

### **Green-Rainbow Party local chapters**

<b>Club</b>	<b>Political Committee</b>
Quick and easy to organize	More complex to set up; strictly regulated by the State
Voting members can be from anywhere in Massachusetts	Voting members must be residents of the City/Town/Ward
Supporting members as well as registered members may vote	Only registered Party members may vote
Can engage in any activism as a group except fundraising or expending funds for electoral or ballot initiative campaigns	Can engage in any activism including all aspects of electoral and ballot campaigning
No registration or reporting directly to the State	Strict registration and reporting requirements to the State
No registration or reporting to the IRS	Strict registration and reporting to IRS (as a 527 organization) if it chooses to do political fundraising

### **Starting a Green-Rainbow Party Club**

#### **First step toward organizing locally**

As the simplest local structure, a GRP Club is the first step toward organizing locally.

#### **To form a Green-Rainbow Party Club:**

1. Contact the Membership Director; let her/him know about your interest in starting a Green-Rainbow Party Club. S/he will discuss the process with you, answer any questions, and put you in touch with another Green-Rainbow Local organizer as a mentor to guide you through getting started.
2. Ask the Membership Director how to get lists of supporting and registered GRP members in your area so you can invite them to a meeting.

3. Hold a meeting with at least three members. The meeting must be open to the public and democratically run. Beyond the three founding members, any resident of Massachusetts may join. Give your Club a descriptive name (it doesn't need to have the word "Club" in its title).
4. Draw up your Club's structure or bylaws (see Appendix for sample). Try to keep them simple, and remember that they may always be amended. Because of the GRP's commitment to gender parity, you must have female and male leadership (co-chair or comparable) and specific goals for representing the diversity (at minimum, including racial/ethnic diversity) of the area your Club represents.
5. Send the following material to the Secretary of the GRP:
  - a. Names and contact information of at least three organizers who are GRP members (either registered or supporting), including diversity requirements noted in step 4.
  - b. A copy of the Club's structure, including statement of purpose.
  - c. The minutes of your first organizing meeting, including location, decisions, meeting schedule, and members in attendance.
  - d. The name of an organizer from a veteran Local who will act as a mentor to the new Club. (Contact the Membership Director if you need help getting a mentor.)
6. Sign at least one and preferably two organizers from the Club onto the [locals@massgreens.org](mailto:locals@massgreens.org) e-mail listserve. If no one in the Club has regular internet access, be sure that the GRP Secretary has phone or postal contact information for at least two organizers.

Upon completion of the above, the Secretary will certify your Club. A Club may then engage in any kind of political activity EXCEPT raise money, *independent of an established Political Committee*, for the purposes of supporting the GRP or any type of political campaign. The Club may nonetheless raise money for its own purposes, e.g., holding an event to educate the public about issues, distributing informational literature, showing a movie, etc. If you are uncertain about whether a fundraising effort is regulated, please consult with the Party's Secretary and/or Membership Director.

## **Starting a Green-Rainbow Party Political Committee**

### **An official Party structure**

Ward/Town/City Political Committees are normally elected on the day of the presidential primary (see related deadlines below). However, the Green-Rainbow Party can establish new Political Committees at any time. This procedure is different, as explained below.

*The first step is to form a GRP Club* (see above). This helps a local chapter gain experience and build resources, before taking on the more exacting requirements made on a Political Committee and its officers. Note that there can be only one Green-Rainbow Political Committee in any ward, city, or town. If there are several GRP Clubs in a given area, they will need to cooperate in forming the Political Committee. Also note that a city committee cannot exist without at least one ward committee, since a city committee consists of the members of the ward committees in that city. (Towns don't have wards.)

### **To form a GRP Political Committee before the next presidential primary:**

1. Evaluate the impact of membership restrictions. Although the Committee can appoint any member to participate in Committee activities, the only *voting* members are those who are registered Green-Rainbow Party voters in the city/town/ward where the Committee is located.
2. Carefully review the guidelines for fundraising and expenditures, and understand thoroughly the filing requirements and deadlines. If the Committee chooses to engage in political fundraising, the Committee's treasurer is personally liable for failure to comply with filing requirements and is subject to monetary penalties.
3. The GRP State Committee is required to appoint the Political Committee's members. As a preliminary step, the Club(s) can meet to vote for three to 35 individuals whose names (including gender and at least racial/ethnic diversity) are to be submitted to the

Secretary of the GRP for appointment by the State Committee, which will also appoint a temporary presiding officer for the Political Committee's first meeting.

4. Since the State Committee is also required to call the first meeting, coordinate details with the State Committee, including inviting all registered members to the meeting.
5. At the first meeting, while making the legal requirements clear, hold elections to fill at least four positions: the co-chairs (one male, one female), secretary, and treasurer; and any other officers of choice. To ensure proportional representation, you must use the election method that is specified in Party bylaws.
6. Because of the GRP's commitment to diversity and to leadership coming up from the grassroots, all locals of the GRP are expected to strive for various forms of diversity in their membership, including being at least slightly more representative of the different people of color groups than the percentages in the area they represent.
7. Within 10 days of the first meeting, file the "Statement of Organization of Ward/Town/City Committee" with the city/town clerk, secretary of state, OCPF (Office of Campaign and Political Finances), and GRP. This statement is found at: <http://www.state.ma.us/ocpf/forms/101wtc.pdf>

**To form a GRP Political Committee as part of the next presidential primary:**

1. Note steps 1 and 2 above.
2. Note election deadlines below for getting names on the primary ballot. Further details will be provided regarding eligibility and number of signatures required for nomination.
3. The elected Committee schedules its first meeting on the 31st to 40th day after the day of the presidential primary.
4. The Committee holds its first meeting to elect chair(s), secretary, and treasurer.
5. Same as step 6 above.

**Deadlines for electing Political Committees at the 2004 presidential primary**

- 8/1/03      Deadline for notifying Secretary of Commonwealth of the number of members to be elected.
- 8/5/03      City/town committee nomination papers available.
- 8/19/03     Last day for candidates to enroll in the Party.
- 11/7/03     Last day to submit nomination papers to city/town registrars.
- 11/18/03    Last day to submit nomination papers to Secretary of Commonwealth.

**Sources for more details**

Several documents are available online or from the GRP Secretary. State Guides from OCPF (Office of Campaign and Political Finances) on ward/town/city and other Party Committees are available at: <http://www.state.ma.us/ocpf/guides/wtc.pdf>

Pertinent Massachusetts law can be found at:

Political Committees (Ch. 52): <http://www.state.ma.us/legis/laws/mgl/gl-52-toc.htm>

Campaign Finance (Ch. 55): <http://www.state.ma.us/legis/laws/mgl/gl-55-toc.htm>

See Section 7 of the GRP bylaws for rules governing Locals:

[http://www.massgreens.org/Documents/ByLaws/bylaws\\_2002\\_03\\_23.pdf](http://www.massgreens.org/Documents/ByLaws/bylaws_2002_03_23.pdf)

There is also a Locals e-mail list ([locals@massgreens.org](mailto:locals@massgreens.org)) where all organizers of local chapters share information and questions relating to organizing and maintaining Locals. Contact the Membership Director to join the list ([membership.director@massgreens.org](mailto:membership.director@massgreens.org)).

**Thank you for your interest in building the Party**

We're very excited by all the interest in forming Green-Rainbow Party Locals since these are the basic building blocks not just of the Party, but of the future we hope to create for our communities, Commonwealth, country, and planet. Please do not hesitate to contact any of the formal Green-Rainbow Party leadership or each other, as we work together so democracy can work for all of us.