



# Structure

## Local Chapters

Most of NOW's politicking and organizing is carried out by more than 600 local chapters that do everything from staging protest marches and pickets to coordinating educational programs. Each chapter must have at least ten members and each elects its own, generally unpaid, officials. Each chapter must elect a president and treasurer and usually elects additional officials such as a vice president. In a handful of large cities, local officers get paid.

Local chapters also elect delegates who attend NOW's yearly National Conference. NOW's bylaws stipulate that "the National Conference shall be the supreme governing body of NOW." It is at these conferences held every June or July that policies are decided. Delegates vote on a wide range of proposals from establishing a new staff position to setting forth the group's stance on such issues as welfare reform. Once the organization takes a position on an issue, an action campaign is developed.

Decisions made at these conferences are binding to all members of NOW. Aside from having to adhere to the bylaws and policies decided at the national conventions, local chapters are relatively autonomous, working on issues that best suit their communities.

## State Organizations

Each state also has a state organization which focuses on public policy and advocacy in the various state legislatures. The only leadership position that the state organizations must have is a state coordinator, also referred to as the state president. But often there are other officials who, along with the president, are elected at state conferences. Officials at the state level are usually volunteers, although a state organization might hire a lobbyist. In some cases, the paid lobbyist and the president are one and the same. State organizations are run by a board made up of a handful of local chapter representatives, and the state president and other officials. States have their own bylaws, none of which can conflict with the national ones.

## Regions

There are also nine regional segments of NOW, but, unlike other levels, the regional offices don't do much in the way of initiating protests or lobbying. Their main purpose is to elect members to the national board and ease communication among the states in a particular region. The number of members within each region determines the maximum number of board members allowed from an individual state and the minimum number of board seats that must be filled by women of color. Regions do not solicit members.

## National

The 42-member national board of directors is comprised of NOW members from the group's nine regions. They meet about every two months and discuss issues such as funding. The national board also makes policy decisions that would normally be made at the National Conference but, because the National Conference is held only once per year, the national board must sometimes vote on issues in the periods between the conferences. The board's actions must not violate bylaws or any of the decisions that come out of the National Conference. However, the national board does have the authority to remove NOW officers, board members, members or chapters if they have acted against NOW's policies.

All levels of NOW work together to some degree almost all of the time. While local chapters have freedom to do the work they want, rarely will they stage an action without help from the national and state organizations. The April 1996 Fight the Right March in San Francisco shows this cooperation at work. National NOW initiated the idea to hold a national action on affirmative action in California with the help of the California state organization. Then at the National Conference, the delegation approved this plan. Representatives from National NOW held weekly phone conferences that included California's state coordinator as well as the San Francisco chapter president who in turn held regular meeting with state and chapter activists.

## Membership and Funding

Membership is open to men as well as women. One can join at the local, state or national level. Upon joining, members automatically belong to the national organization as well as their state's organization. New members can affiliate with a local chapter or can even start a new one if none exists. All members pay dues, usually \$35 per year, but in some states \$40. The organization also offers reduced dues and payment plans.