



# Books Not Bombs Campaign Toolkit

Supporting students displaced by the Syrian conflict through university scholarships

**JANUARY 2018**

This short guide is meant to provide students, alumni, educators and university administrations with our strategy, tactics and resources to run a successful Books Not Bombs campaign.

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## Our Story

The world is witnessing the highest levels of displacement we have ever seen. An unprecedented 65.3 million people globally have been forced from home—among them are nearly 21.3 million refugees, over half of whom are children. Many are fleeing war or persecution in their homeland and will never return. Specifically concerning Syria, an estimated 100,000 college-age Syrian students are out of school in neighboring countries, and hundreds of thousands more are struggling to get a quality education. With no end to the conflict in sight, it is crucial that we come together to find ways to give Syrian children the education they need.

Launched in 2016 by Students Organize for Syria (SOS) as a response to the Syrian education crisis, what started off as a handful of students is now a [movement](#) involving over 20,000 students at more than 190 universities in America and around the world.

The main aim of the campaign is to create at least one scholarship opportunity open to a displaced Syrian student and advertise that through the Institute of International Education's [Syria Consortium for Higher Education in Crisis](#) (hereafter called the IIE Syria Consortium). Books Not Bombs focuses on advocating for Syrian students by influencing universities to waive tuition for a certain number of displaced students.



The Consortium is a clearinghouse with opportunities that are available to Syrian students, making them easier for a potential applicant to find. The campaign also works to raise awareness of the education crisis for the hundreds of thousands of Syrian students out of school, in Syria and in the refugee diaspora throughout the Middle East, Europe, North America and elsewhere.

Today, Books Not Bombs is active at over 190 universities, mainly in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom. It is supported by more than 20,000 student organizers and supporters, who engage their campus communities and leaders in dialogue through demonstrations, petition-drives, resolutions, fundraisers, and educational events. Student organizers have achieved significant victories, resulting in universities such as Barnard College, Michigan State University and the University of Southern California creating scholarship opportunities for Syrian refugee students.

In summer of 2017, Books Not Bombs announced the formation of the Books Not Bombs Fellowship, a new fund that aims to provide supplementary funding to displaced students pursuing higher education or currently enrolled in a university program. The scholarship is one of the most inclusive opportunities available to displaced students, and is open to students of any nationality studying in any country around the world. Books Not Bombs students and community members fundraise for the scholarship on a continuous basis. The program was piloted until the end of 2017. You can learn more, including details about our fellows, [here](#).

## **Campaign Goal & Strategy**

At the highest level, the campaign goal is to get your university administrators to agree to provide scholarships for Syrian students who have been displaced by conflict by joining the IIE Syria Consortium. If your school has already created scholarships for displaced students and joined the Consortium, you can still participate by fundraising for the Karam Foundation [Karam Scholars Fund](#). The Karam Scholar's Fund is our partner organization's program that provides supplementary funding for Syrian students in higher education.

Another way you can still participate is by [organizing a college information session](#) for displaced students in your area.

### **What's our strategy for creating scholarships?**

Our strategy is to mobilize students, faculty, and administrators by providing them a set of clear actions that lead to the creation of scholarships at their university.

### **What is campaigning?**

Campaigning is putting your strategy into action to achieve a goal. In short, campaigning is about building power for your idea by creating relationships, organizing people, building your audience, holding events, and leveraging media and other creative tools and tactics.


### **How do I start or join a scholarship campaign on my campus?**

Visit our [website](#) to see if a fellow student at your university has already started a campaign. If yes, sign the petition and get involved on campus. If you need help finding your petition starter, email us at [info@books-not-bombs.com](mailto:info@books-not-bombs.com) for assistance.

If your university doesn't have an active petition, email [info@books-not-bombs.com](mailto:info@books-not-bombs.com) and ask to join the campaign. We'll set you up with a petition, add you to our network, and counsel you on how to start your campaign based on your situation.

### **Who's the target?**

The primary target for the campaign is your university administration. Depending on your university, this may include your university president, provost, college's dean, or board of trustees.



Make sure to do your own research to determine who at your university has the power and ability to create a scholarship.

### **But what will I actually have to *do* to create scholarships?**

We recommend students perform these four core actions:

1. **Start or sign a [petition](#) at your university** (preferably with your .edu email addresses) and gather signatures to demonstrate student support. Don't forget to share the petition on social media, email and at events.
2. **Form a committee** of students, faculty, and administrators from the admissions, financial aid, international students, and scholarships department. This committee will be responsible for researching and putting together a proposal for the university president or provost to look over. Study this [case studies report](#), and listen to this webinar on admissions best practices when dealing with refugee students ([Part 1](#) + [Part 2](#)). Together you will decide on a timeline and communication strategy.
3. **Hold an offline event** (for example, a film screening, sit-in, peaceful demonstration) in a highly visible and trafficked location on campus. Ask attendees to sign your petition and get their email information. Make sure to send regular updates on the campaign to your supporters.
4. **Introduce a resolution in your student government** in support of the campaign to have buy-in from your student representatives. For reference, read resolutions passed by [Tufts University](#), [University of Southern California](#), [University of Michigan](#), [Michigan State University](#), and [UC Irvine](#).
5. **Meet with your university administrators** (for example, your president, provost, admissions department) to pitch your Books Not Bombs proposal and ask them to create scholarships.

Other ways you can take action include:


1. **[Fundraise](#) for the Karam Scholar's Fund**
2. Organize a college-info session marketed towards displaced students in your local community.
3. **Write an op-ed** about why you support Books Not Bombs. For reference, read op-eds from [Columbia University](#) and [University of Southern California](#) students.
4. **Reach out to campus groups** for support of your petition and resolution efforts.
5. **Hold a coordinated day of action** with both students and educators (for example, a public forum or 'teach-in')
6. **Perform pro-refugee actions** such as hosting an event through [NoMuslimBanEver](#) or a dinner through [Refugees Welcome dinners](#) for resettled refugees in your community.

### **Who are the campaign's participants?**

When it comes to campus campaigning, administrations tend to respond when they hear something from a diverse coalition of groups across the campus and local community. It is therefore critical that you build a broad base of support for this campaign over the course of the semester. As such, we encourage you to engage participants from a variety of segments (i.e. faculty, undergrad, alumni, community leaders, etc.) and a range of different groups.

When considering which individuals and groups to approach to support the effort, you will want to keep in mind three central questions:

- **Are they easy and obvious allies?** Certain groups may be more likely to support your effort than others. Don't ever assume opposition from any group, but do immediately prioritize reaching out to those groups who might most naturally and easily support you.



Groups with a record of engagement in social justice issues or international human rights issues may fall into this category.

- **Can they provide diversity of coalition?** Administrators tend to be more receptive to messages that come from a range of participants (faculty, students, community, etc.) and a range of interests. While it is strategic for us to get the groups naturally aligned with our campaign on-board, we'll need to expand beyond the usual suspects, to groups that will bring diversity on all fronts- ideological, political, gender, gender identity and sexual orientation, racial, ethnic, etc. Always strive for balance. If you reach out to College Democrats, make sure to reach out to College Republicans. If you reach out to Students for Justice in Palestine, reach out to your campus pro-Israel group.
- **Do they have access to the administration?** Certain groups have more access to administrators and getting them engaged can be helpful to really get the administration's ear.
- **Do they have significant reach?** If a potential partner can help us get the message out to significant segment of the campus, that can help us to amplify our message

## Creative Tactics

Campus organizing efforts often falter because they turn into backroom negotiations with the administrations rather than a public-facing effort that galvanises campus and community support. As you plan out your campaign and the tactics you will deploy throughout the semester, make sure to identify ways that you can your group can build awareness of the campaign on campus, and to build a constituency of support for the campaign.

### What is a tactic?

A tactic is essentially the actions that you will deploy throughout the semester to galvanize support that you can then demonstrate to the administration. Tactics take many forms and can range from hosting a debate to collecting signatures on a petition to publishing ads or getting an op-ed placed in your campus newspaper. The tactics you decide to deploy will depend on which groups/participants you are seeking to galvanize and what creative ideas you can come up with to reach and engage them.

While deciding on tactics, you will want to consider the participants that will be most strategic to demonstrate support from, and actions will be most effective at reaching and engaging them. So, for example, while writing an open letter to the administration may be a great tactic for your allies in the faculty or other campus organizers, running a film screening or creative stunt will be much more effective at engaging larger audiences of students.

### Questions to ask yourself when deciding on a campaign tactics:

- How does this tactic help us to to achieve our goal? Does it help to build awareness for the campaign on campus and/or build a constituency of support?
- Is the message of this tactic understandable and persuasive? Is it clearly linked to the campaign?
- When should we deploy this tactic?
- Is the tactic worth the limited time, energy and resources of our group?
- What is the tone of the action and how will people react?
- How will this tactic affect our organization and how people perceive us?
- How will this tactic affect our relationship with allies, key stakeholders and our team?
- How can we celebrate and debrief this tactic?

### Some tactics to consider:

- Tabling to inform students about your effort.

- Chalking in high traffic areas of campus (a good tactic to express creativity, and to use #BooksNotBombs and #SaveASeatforSyria)
- Gathering signatures or letters of support from students or faculty.
- Writing an opinion piece for your campus newspaper.
- Writing a resolution for your student or faculty assembly or senate, calling on the administration to take action.
- Arranging a screening of a film related to the Syrian crisis.
- Organizing a panel of speakers to discuss an aspect of the crisis related to education.
- Organizing an visual exhibit in the center of campus or in a high-traffic area (with, for example, pictures of Syrian students seeking scholarships or pictures of individuals who came to your campus in the past as refugee students or scholars).
- A silent demonstration in the center of your campus (using a high-impact visual; examples include a mock refugee camp, backpacks laid out on the ground, empty chairs or desks)

## Campaign Troubleshooting

### What if I run into funding concerns? What are alternative forms of funding for scholarships?

We first recommend exploring the idea of tuition-fee waivers for refugee and asylum-seeker students. If this is not possible at your school, explore ways to work with the scholarship department to find a private donor interested in funding a scholarship (like Barnard College). If that too doesn't work, then consider a fundraising plan to create a scholarship. If you take this route, make sure to schedule a meeting with BNB staff to go over logistics.

We also suggest exploring the idea of **passing a resolution** through your student government to raise funds for the students per semester. A \$5 or \$10 fee per semester would raise a significant funding pool. Do research to determine what is appropriate for your school.

### I don't have time to campaign, but I still want to join the movement. What can I do?

You have two options. First, you can work on building up campaigning skills this semester according to your time schedule.

Three skills we believe are important to campaigning are:

1. Knowing how to write, pitch, and publish an op-ed
2. Event planning
3. Network and community building


Depending on your time schedule and what you're interested in learning, you can reach out and request help on any one of those skills.

Your second option is to **become a language mentor** to Syrian refugee students who are trying to continue their education. This will entail helping them find programs that match their needs and supporting them through the application process. Consider joining [Paper Airplanes](#) and becoming an English mentor to displaced Syrian students.

## Tips & Tricks

### Tips on Introducing a Resolution

The three keys to introducing a successful resolution in your student and faculty assemblies or senates are:

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1. To pattern your resolution on past, successful resolutions. Two examples are included here, one from [Tufts University](#) and one from the [University of Southern California](#). Modify these by adding language from your university's mission and values statements (e.g. "Whereas, the mission of Global University is to foster international cooperation and exchange...")
  2. To find active, engaged, and knowledgeable partners who are members of those bodies. The first step in this process is research. Go on your student government website and find senators or council members who are engaged in social justice and equity issues. Reach out to ask for them to sponsor. Connect with faculty members who work on refugee or international issues. Ask them to introduce the resolution in the faculty senate, to write an OpEd for the campus or local newspaper or to gather faculty support letters.
  3. To follow through.
    - a. Gather a list of diverse co-sponsoring organizations and individuals who will make your resolution seem broad-based, uncontroversial, and popular.
    - b. List your co-sponsoring organizations in your resolution.
    - c. Gather supporting statements and signatures and deliver them on the night of voting.
    - d. Meet with individual council or senate members to explain to them why this is so necessary. Be patient with their concerns (whether valid or not) and bring them back to the fact that this is a moral issue, and one that is entirely consistent with your university's mission and history.
    - e. Show up the night of voting to reiterate your position. Bring supporters if you can.

## Tips on Engaging Your Administration


Think of meeting with your university administration as "closing the deal." As such, you want to make it as easy as possible for them to give you their support, and to frame your effort as something that both continues existing university policy (i.e. low-stakes) and satisfies the will of the entire campus community (i.e. uncontroversial).

### Securing a meeting

You'll probably want to hold off on requesting a meeting until you have time to gather support from student organizations, community groups/leaders and faculty, and other supporting documentation. You can then use this support as a vehicle to request a meeting with the administration, making sure to invite and mention key members of your coalition. So, for example, if you secure the support of your Graduate and Faculty Senates and/or key student organizations, you can then write an email to the relevant campus administrator drawing attention to that fact, and requesting a meeting to follow up on it:

"Dear Provost XXX,

I hope that this email finds you well. The Faculty Senate, Graduate Student Government, Students Organize for Syria, and our coalition of 22 student organizations would like to request a meeting with you regarding our recent resolution in support of Syrian scholars and students that have been displaced by conflict. I would like to be present at this meeting, along with GSG President X, Chair of the Middle Eastern Studies program Dr. X, USG Senator X, and President of USC Hillel X.



Please let me know what I can do to aid in planning/facilitating this meeting as I know your schedule is incredibly busy. Thank you for your time and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Best regards,

Christopher Records  
Senator, Graduate Student Government  
University of Southern California”

You will probably want to secure a meeting with your university’s provost, who is the person with responsibility for academic affairs. You may not get to speak to this person herself/himself the first go around; instead, they may direct you to a vice provost or some other administrator. If this is the case, politely accept and reiterate your request to meet with the provost at her/his earliest convenience after you meet with the vice provost/vice dean/whoever.

## Preparing for the meeting

Once you secure your meeting, ensure that you spend a significant amount of time preparing materials, laying out an agenda, and discussing the flow of the meeting with your invitees. We’ll be here to support you thinking this process through, and everything you may need. You’ll want to prepare meeting materials for every attendee. This means folders with agendas, a list of your supporting student organizations, any printed news articles outlining your work, an outline of your “ask,” and any other relevant materials. Printed faculty letters of support (as many as possible) are a definite yes. Other supporting evidence may include historical documents highlighting the university’s past support for refugees, an article highlighting the university’s membership in other initiatives (such as the IIE Scholar Rescue Fund), etc.


Most importantly, make sure that you include the contact information for the relevant IIE staff and a printed IIE Syria Consortium membership form. You may also want to look at university messaging for hints on how to frame your effort, adopting key phrases from the university’s mission or core values statements.

## After the meeting

Make sure you end your meeting with a specific ask, that you offer to put the administration in contact with the IIE staff, and that you immediately ask for a follow up meeting. After the meeting, email every attendee thanking them for their time and expressing your excitement/hope for the next follow-up. Follow up on any questions or requests for information immediately. What happens next with the campaign will really depend on the response you received from the administration. It may be time to turn up the heat and escalate the pressure on the administration, or hey - maybe we’ve won! We’ll be here to help you assess next steps.

## For Alumni

As valued members of the campus community and key donors, alumni have significant influence. Alumni can organize groups of their fellow alums to take their concerns directly to their university provosts or presidents. Often, university presidents and provosts will be especially receptive to alumni feedback, mindful of the critical role that they play.



Alumni can directly endow or fund scholarships for refugee students, by directly contacting the development or advancement department of their university. Alumni can also leverage their social and professional connections, networks and communication skills to get the university administration on board with joining the IIE Syria Consortium.

To learn more, send us an email at [info@books-not-bombs.com](mailto:info@books-not-bombs.com) to join the campaign. We will help you start the initiative or connect you with current BNB efforts at your university.

## For Educators

Educators are in a prime position to bring the topic of Syria and the education crisis into their classrooms. Both educators and administrators can lead a Books Not Bombs campaign at their campus.

### **How can I initiate a campaign for scholarships at my university?**

There are several options for starting a campaign at your university. You can pursue action through your university's Academic or Faculty Senate, perhaps proposing a resolution to urge the provost or president to create scholarships for refugee students. You can gather letters of support from other faculty members, package them together, and send them to high-level administrators, following up to ensure that they acknowledge your concerns. You can mentor a student activist who is organizing for scholarships, providing expertise and faculty statements of support.

### **What is campaigning?**

Campaigning is setting a specific goal and mapping out a strategy on how to achieve that goal, through specific tactics. The goal is almost always about changing people's behavior. Some campaign tactics that university educators can undertake include: gathering faculty letters of support, discussing the relevant issues with other faculty members and administrators, hosting an event on refugee education issues, and introducing a resolution in your Academic or Faculty Senate.

### **What are alternative forms of funding?**

At the very basic level, we are asking universities to waive tuition for a certain number of Syrian students. But depending on your school, a tuition waiver will not be enough to attend the institution. For example, housing costs for students at one NYC university are \$16K per school year, with roommates.


We recommend campaigners first prepare a proposal for what additional funding is needed to allow a Syrian refugee to attend university, and suggest possible avenues to find that funding. Possible avenues include: private donors and consulting the development and/or advancement arm of the university administration.

Approach the university administration and pitch your proposal. If they agree to work on the project, they can help you secure the additional funding. We also suggest exploring the idea of passing a resolution through student government to raise fees for students per semester. A \$5 or \$10 fee per semester would raise a significant funding pool. Do research to determine what is appropriate for your school.

## For University Administrators

**What are some common first steps that other university administrators have taken to create scholarships for refugee students?**





University administrators often form a specific working group or taskforce, consisting of administrators from financial aid, housing and admissions, as well as representatives of the IIE, to initiate the process of joining the Syria Consortium. Involving experts from various departments and offices is often beneficial.

### **How do university administrators deal with admissions issues?**

One of the core issues for Syrians is a lack of transcripts, letters of recommendation, etc. Many universities have designed alternate protocols for assessing student learning and gauging fitness to be admitted to the university. Most arrange a Skype interview through the IIE to ascertain English language proficiency and general character (with a TEFOL test required later, to certificate English proficiency). Most evaluate the same admissions essays that any other student would be required to submit. Some schools arrange skills-based testing to determine mastery of prerequisites. For example, a student seeking admission to engineering may be required to take an online, remotely proctored exam testing calculus skills, etc. Again, each university determines its own arrangements with the IIE.

### **How do universities deal with housing and community?**

Universities can determine to offer housing funding or not. At USC, the cost of living stipends awarded to graduate students can be used for housing costs. Additional support to help students secure housing will be offered through the Student Housing Office and through the USC Department of Religious Life, which was assigned the official liaison to admitted Syrian students, with responsibility for ensuring their emotional well-being and social integration into the campus community.

### **How do we join the IIE?**

Email [SyriaSupport@iie.org](mailto:SyriaSupport@iie.org) expressing commitment to supporting Syrian refugee students and joining the consortium. An administrator will follow up with the paperwork.

### **How do we build an inclusive movement on campus for Syrian refugee students?**

Email us and we can see if a student/educator at your university has already reached out to the campaign. If so, we can connect you both. We also have an [Education Commixttee](#) that can offer advice and case studies on how to build a supportive community for refugee students.

### **What are specific needs and/or challenges for Syrian refugee students?**

1. Syrian education doesn't heavily emphasize English language, and most Syrian students find the GRE/TOEFL to be a big hurdle. These tests are only offered in certain cities in the region at certain times. For example, refugee students in Turkey have to travel to Adana to take the GRE test. Some universities will do a Skype interview to assess a candidate's proficiency in English.
2. There is a huge need for scholarships specifically to learn English language.
3. Many Syrian students struggle with getting proper documentation for the courses they've completed. Syrian students outside the country cannot ask a relative to pick up their documents, they actually have to go and pick up their records themselves. Student records also have to be stamped by the Syrian Department of State. For many refugee students, especially those who are civil society and health leaders, this process is too dangerous to attempt.
4. Many Syrian refugee students have done more schooling than they have documented credit for. It is very common for men to avoid taking the last exam of their program to retain "student" status and avoid joining the military. Many civil society and health leaders stopped school without getting their diplomas to take care of their communities after 2011.

5. Syrian refugee students need mentorship on how to navigate transferring from Syrian higher education to Western higher education and finding scholarships to support their studies.
6. Many Syrian refugee students cannot study without a full scholarship covering housing, textbook, and other associated living and school expenses
7. Syrian refugee students outside the US face significant travel challenges, especially to the United States.
8. Syrian refugee students already resettled in America (2,500) are in need of higher education counseling.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **How does this campaign work? Do I have to fundraise?**

No, there is no fundraising involved with the Books Not Bombs campaign. Students and educators work to raise awareness on the Syrian education crisis on their campus and support for their university to join the [Institute of International Education's Syria Consortium for Higher Education In Crisis](#). The ultimate goal is for students and educators to ask their university to formally commit to joining the Syria Consortium.

### **Why do you focus on Syrian refugees?**

Our campaign was started by Syrian American students as a response to the education crisis in Syria in early 2016. An estimated 200,000 college age students are out of school due to the conflict, which has left 6,000 schools out of use. We focus on scholarships for Syrian students because the crisis is extremely urgent and ongoing. We stand in solidarity with related efforts to increase educational and scholarship opportunities for all students.

### **How do these scholarships work? Do they cover living expenses, or just tuition? How can I apply to them?**

When a university commits to joining the IIE's Syria Consortium, the university agrees to waive tuition. Living expenses awards are available on a very limited basis through the IIE Emergency Student Fund. Each university that joins the consortium has its own criteria for admissions, and you apply directly to the university. A list of these scholarships and how to apply is found [here](#).

The IIE has another program for Syrian students: The IIE Syria Scholar Program. A prospective student applies to the program first before applying to a university. If selected, the student is matched with a university that offers their program of study and is awarded \$50,000 towards living expenses. Applications for the Syria Scholar Program open once a year in the fall.

### **Who is qualified for these scholarships?**


Any Syrian student whose education was disrupted by conflict. The student can be inside Syria, a refugee outside the country, resettled in America, under Temporary Protected Status, or seeking asylum at the time of application.

### **I go to a public university. Can I still work on this campaign?**

Yes. Public universities can join the Syria Consortium by advertising already existing international student funds on the consortium page.

### **My university already has scholarships for Syrian students, can I still join the campaign?**

Yes. Your job is a little bit easier now that your school already created scholarships: urge your university to advertise the scholarships by joining the IIE Syria Consortium. Part of increasing



access to higher education is getting people to know that opportunities exist.

**I go to a university outside of the United States. Can I still join the campaign?**

Absolutely. The IIE Syria Consortium is open to universities around the world.

**What happens after refugee students enroll at my university? How do we support them?**

The university environment is a perfect place to welcome and support young refugees. A great example of students and educators coming together for new refugee students is at the University of Evansville, a small school in Indiana. Evansville created [twenty-three scholarships](#) for Syrian students whose education was disrupted by the conflict. The Evansville community then set up [Scholars For Syria](#), a support network for the students that also provides them the opportunity to make presentations about the conflict to educate classrooms throughout the community.

## Other Resources

[Social Media Toolkit](#)

[Books Not Bombs Brand Book](#)

[IIE PEER Program](#)

[IIE Report: Supporting Displaced and Refugee Students in Higher Education: Principles and Best Practices](#)

[WES Guide: Syrian Refugee Crisis: Methods for Credential Assessment](#)

[‘Know Your Rights’ & Digital Privacy Resources](#)