# How to Get Leafleting Approval at Colleges

Students, faculty, and staff have a right to leaflet anywhere outdoors on campus. Non-students are usually allowed too, though there can be place and time restrictions. It’s always best to try leafleting first. If you are courteous, college security likely won’t have any problem with you leafleting.

If you are stopped or questioned while leafleting a college, here are some tips to resolve the situation.

1. **I was told to stop leafleting on a college campus.** If you are stopped from leafleting, it is very helpful to get more information. In a friendly way, ask the person their name and which department they are in (if it’s not obvious). Also ask if they know the name of the department that manages leafleting/tabling and if they can direct you there to get the correct forms. Leafleters have been incorrectly stopped by students, interns or administrators who don’t know the policy, and you’d rather not stop leafleting if you don’t have to. Sometimes permission is needed, and they will grant you permission on the spot, so it’s worth asking. It is also easier to track down the policy and forms while you are on campus than from phone or email, so do your best to get any written policies or forms that you can. By taking this first step, you’ll be helping us resolve the situation faster so other leafleters don’t run into the same problems.
2. **Persuade the administrators to let you leaflet.** When talking to school administrators, you can say that Vegan Outreach leaflets at a lot of colleges and we don’t cause problems. You can reassure them that you are polite and courteous and that you’ll pick up any discarded booklets. Whatever their concern is, try to satisfy them. Realize that the person you are talking to may or may not have the authority to give you permission. You can even ask them directly who has the authority to grant you permission, then you can direct your correspondence to them. As a last resort, you can say leafleting on colleges is a ‘low-impact free speech activity that is usually upheld by the courts.’ Keep in mind that some people feel threatened if you mention free speech and courts, so try to get access by being friendly before you go this route.
3. **Are public sidewalks available?** If you reach a roadblock and can’t leaflet on campus that day, before leaving the campus, check if there are any public streets that run through campus or next to campus. You have a constitutional right to leaflet on public sidewalks without prior approval. How can you tell if a street is public just by looking? If the street exists outside the campus and looks the same as it goes through or next to campus, it is likely public. If there are public businesses or private residences on the road it is also likely public. You can tell administrators in a friendly but firm way that you will stay on sidewalks of public roads. Most administrators don’t know more than you about what is public, so be firm and don’t assume they are right. Of course if you are threatened with arrest, or are unsure, you should listen to what they say. You can later verify which streets are public.
4. **How can I tell if a street and sidewalk are public?**
   1. Determine the county the school is in - [http://quickfacts.census.gov/cgi-bin/qfd/lookup](http://quickfacts.census.gov/cgi-bin/qfd/lookup" \t "_blank" \o "http://quickfacts.census.gov/cgi-bin/qfd/lookup)
   2. Google the phrase:  “County Name property appraiser” to find the county’s property appraiser website (they have maps for tax purposes). Look for a property map or address search.
   3. Search by address or browse the map. Each county map is different, and some are more user-friendly than others. Zoom into an area of interest. Usually you can click on properties to find the owner. If you click on a road and no owner is listed, then it is a right-of-way and you can leaflet there without approval.
5. **I was stopped from leafleting on a public sidewalk or park.** If a police officer stops you from leafleting, you should listen to them and stop leafleting. The same goes if it’s a security guard that has the authority to arrest you. You can later resolve the situation with the police department and city. Otherwise, tell the person that you have a First Amendment right to leaflet. If they threaten to call the police, tell them that’s fine and that the police will support your right to leaflet.
6. **The police stopped me from leafleting on a public street or park.** Call the non-emergency phone number for the police department and say that you are having a free speech problem and that an officer is not allowing you to distribute booklets on a public sidewalk or park. They may have you speak with a supervisor, the police chief, or the police advisory attorney, who is the attorney that advises police on the law. Explain that you are offering free booklets on the benefits of vegetarian eating and that the booklets are 'political' leaflets not 'commercial' leaflets. Police are wary of lawsuits, so if you mention ‘free speech’, they will usually respond quickly. Some cities such as Phoenix even have an officer that specializes is protecting free speech of animal advocates, so you may make useful contacts in the police department.
7. **Find the college’s leafleting policy online.** If there are no public sidewalks to use, we’ll have to get approval from the college. The first step is finding the policy. Some schools have very thorough policies covering leafleting, tabling, speaking, signature gathering, etc, while some schools have absolutely nothing. Google the following phrases:
   1. “*college name* literature distribution”
   2. “*college name* leafleting”
   3. “*college name* free speech”
   4. “*college name* free speech zone” (some schools restrict you to certain areas)
   5. “*college name* solicitation” (leafleting is not soliciting but you may find it this way)
   6. “*college name* student activities office” (browse the website for forms and policies)
8. **I could not find the college’s policy online.** If you can’t find the policy, you’ll have to contact the college to find it. These policies are usually managed by the student activities office. Start with the first person on the list, and if they don’t respond after a week or so, ask the next person on the list.
   1. Student Activities Coordinator
   2. Student Activities Director
   3. Vice President of Student Affairs and/or Student Services
   4. President of the College

They are often very busy, so keep it brief, friendly and direct. An example:

May a member of our organization, Vegan Outreach, visit your campus on September 10 to offer students brochures on vegetarian eating?

We offer students brochures promoting a vegetarian diet in a friendly, non-aggressive manner. We don't impede traffic or try to get into conversations but will answer questions if asked. We talk at a normal volume, speaking only to an individual or two at a time and never drawing a crowd. Students are generally interested in our booklets. We pick up any discarded booklets when complete.

I apologize if I missed your free speech policy online, but I could not find it. Many schools allow non-commercial literature distribution on all outdoor sidewalks since it is a low-impact free speech activity. Some schools require a 3-day advanced notification and specify the distribution areas, which courts have upheld as long as they provide good access to students. [also include examples of nearby schools that allow leafleting if possible]

1. **The college policy doesn’t allow leafleting.** If you’ve found the policy and there is a way to leaflet, then you can follow the procedure to leaflet. However, some schools may only allow leafleting in a free speech zone, or may only allow tabling. While these aren’t as good as leafleting, they are worth trying because sometimes you can still reach a lot of people. Also, if you want a lawyer to ultimately challenge the leafleting restrictions, you’ll need to show that the free speech area or tabling restrictions severely limit the number of people you can reach. You can count how many people you actually reach, then estimate how many people you could reach had you been able to leaflet on a busy sidewalk.
2. **The restrictions don’t allow any effective outreach.** If the school doesn’t allow any leafleting or tabling, or if the restrictions are so bad that it’s not even worth your time, we’ll need to get help by our lawyer. Every case is different, so the lawyer will need a lot of details. To make the process go faster, try to gather:
   1. **College’s policy and forms**
   2. **Campus map**
   3. **Photo/video of other free speech you see happening on campus**
   4. **Photo of free speech zone if they have one**
   5. **Contact info (card is best) including email, phone, fax and address of an administrator such as Director/Vice President of Student Life/Student Affairs.**
   6. **How important is this school to leaflet compared to other opportunities in your area**
   7. **How much the restrictions limit outreach (the actual number distributed vs estimated number if allowed to leaflet anywhere)**