

MIAMI DSA

Tabling Guide

FIRST
EDITION



THERE IS
NO
SOCIALISM
WITHOUT
TABLING

www.miamidsa.org

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What is tabling?

Sitting at a table and representing the Miami Democratic Socialists of America at a street fair, political event, rally, or just on a streetcorner! Wherever you're allowed to put a table and hand out flyers, you can do some tabling.

Why do tabling?

Tabling is like canvassing or flyering or any other kind of in-person outreach. You can do it to support specific campaigns or initiatives, or just to introduce your audience to the local chapter of the DSA, and to a democratic socialist (yourself)!

When do we do tabling?

Here are a few examples of events where we've done tabling:

- A Defend J20 Fundraiser
- A Prison Strike Solidarity Rally
- DSA Meetings
- Medicare for All events
- An AJJ concert

How to table Part I: Materials and planning

I. Planning

There are a few things you need to know before you even leave for your event.

1) Where are you going?

Seems obvious, right? You should know not only the overall venue you're headed to, but also where you're going when you get there, or at least who you should ask. Just showing up with all of your stuff and expecting you'll figure it out when you get there can annoy the event organizers and make them less likely to want to see you (and us) again. If you're just tabling in a public space, make sure ahead of time you know where you are allowed to table (this may vary from town to town, but in general don't block the sidewalk or the entrances to any buildings). Also make sure you have space for whatever banners you're planning to use, and where you would hang them (over the front of the table? A wall behind the table? Etc.)

2) Who's your audience?

What kind of event or place are you tabling at? Is it a group focused on a particular issue or set of issues that DSA is also working on (like a prison abolition fundraiser)? Are you going to be getting a lot of people who are starting pretty far left, but might want to see what we're about (like a May Day rally)? Is it going to be a bunch of liberals or progressive Democrats ripe for radicalization (like the state Dem convention)? Is it a community that is likely to be highly educated or one where most people don't have college degrees? What languages will they operate in?

The more you know about the people you're going to see, the better you can prepare. For issue-focused events, obviously you want to make sure you have materials representing DSA's work on that issue (and/or a petition

we're running or other active campaign). The general English & Spanish flyers (miamidsa.org/resources) are basically aimed at a typical liberal or progressive, but if you're going to an event that's mostly socialists, you might want to find something that starts a little more radical, and be sure to bring the other flyers in case they want to see what we're up to and get involved. It also affects how you plan your spiels (see below).

Basically, think about who you're trying to reach when you're tabling at this event, and try to set up a table that will work best for them.

3) How many people are going to be there?

You won't know exactly, but try to ballpark it. If you're going to have a table in a public park for two hours on a random weekend, you might only need, say, fifty copies of the outreach flyer and a few copies of some other materials. If you're going to, say, a concert, you might want to prepare for a couple hundred people at least. If we end up with a communal storage system (see below), having extra isn't going to be a problem, but if you end up with a ton extra and we don't have communal storage, be sure to let the Communication and Outreach WG know so other people can use them!

4) How are you getting your materials?

This will probably change some as our infrastructure builds up.

First, easy question: Do you need a table? The Miami DSA has a neat collapsible table, but you need to be able to get it (eventual goal is to have communal storage, stay tuned). Some events will provide a table for us. Great! If you get the chance, ask how big it's going to be. Stuff that you could use on a card table will look goofy spread out over a ten-foot cafeteria table, and the reverse has obvious problems.

Second, printing. Paper is an unavoidable evil of tabling. Our materials will change over time. Flyers and sign-ups you download from miamidsa.org/resources you can either print them yourself or try to find someone who has already printed some.

You may also have some event-specific materials, for example issue-specific flyers, that you'll have to source yourself. If you can't print them on your own for financial or practical, we do have some members with access to free or cheap printing resources. The communications and outreach wg should be able to connect you to one of them.

For things like buttons, banners, and flag get in touch with Communications and Outreach WG folks to see who has 'em now and arrange to get them before your event (or we'll have communal storage).

5) How are you getting your materials and you to the event?

Again, seems simple, right? If you're taking the collapsible table, a banner, a few hundred flyers, and a sack o'buttons, you at least want some help moving it all. Once you've worked out what you're bringing and how you're getting all of it, make sure you can get everything where you need to go. Car? Bike? Whatever works for you, just don't get to the day of the event and discover you can't get everything where you need it to go.

II. How to use materials

Most of this is obvious, but there are a few pro-tips to using all of our materials effectively.

Banners: Obviously the first rule is don't damage them. Avoid just slapping them up on a wall with painter's tape, though if that's your best option, at least try to get red painter's tape. If you can actually pin the banner to the wall, great, make sure you use gromits (the brass rings) if the banner has them rather than putting holes in the material. When using gromits, protip: put the pins in the wall first and then hang the banner on them.

Some walls you can't pin things too. If you can use heavy-duty double-sided tape, that's the next best option. Otherwise, it's painters tape pretty much.

If you don't have a wall to work with (or a banner stand of some kind) you can also drape the banner over the front of the table with tape.

Posters: Sometimes banners don't make sense. In these cases, print out a little " Miami DSA" sign and try to prop it up on the table somewhere visible.

Business cards: In the world of capitalism there's a "proper" way to use these, but we can use the tools of the oppressor against them. Our business cards are two-sided and have the website/facebook/twitter/instagram/email on the front. If you have a conversation with someone, use the back of the business card to give them specific contact info, for example if they want to get in touch with a particular WG or if they want to talk to one of our mobilizers or talk to you more about socialism. It's a conveniently sized piece of paper and it gives them a business card that reminds them who you are! Don't feel like this is the only way you can use the business cards, though. A lot of people won't want a whole 8.5x11 sheet of paper, but will happily stuff a business card in their pocket, and either way they are reminded that they saw us there.

Flyers: Make sure they are highly visible and easily reachable by passers-by. Brochures (and brochure holders) are great if you have them. People often don't like taking flyers, but encourage them if they're interested. People also tend to forget everything that happened at an event, so sending them home with SOME reminder about Miami DSA is a good idea.

Buttons: Try to bring buttons to events, Buttons are awesome souvenirs, and the thing people are most likely to want to walk away from our table holding.

How to table Part II: What you do when you're tabling

I. Prepare some spiels

(Yiddish, pronounced like “shpeel”, means “a sales pitch”)

Tabling isn't just about setting up a table with a bunch of flyers and walking away. Successful outreach involves talking to people. The catch is, in most contexts you won't get a lot of complete conversations. In a busy event, people might only stop by for a minute or less just to see what you're about, and won't want to stick around for an extended conversation.

To make sure you can say something quick and coherent, practice a couple of short spiels before you start. Ideally, you want to have in your head and ready to go:

- A thirty-second response to the question “What's this?”
- A one-minute response to the question “What's this and why is it here?”
- A two- to three-minute (max) response to the question “What's this, why is it here, and why should I care?”

Any interaction beyond that is just conversation. Don't memorize these word-for-word, by the way. Just have a short outline of what you need to say in your head, and maybe a few practiced phrases to make complex ideas a little clearer.

You should also be prepared for a conversation. Try to know what the organization is up to, not just in whatever WGs you associate with but also in WGs you don't. If you are going to an issue-focused event, be prepared to talk about that issue in as much depth as you can manage.

II. Warning: Beware the Illusion of Explanatory Depth

You're probably reading the last section and thinking "oh, that's easy, I don't need to prepare for that."

You're probably wrong. That's not a comment on you, that's just how the human mind works. The illusion of explanatory depth (IOED) is simply that you think you know more than you actually do. Everyone does. What you *really* know is where to find that information, but you most likely don't have it in your head.

Here's an example from a study (Lawson, 2006, "The science of Cycology", *Memory and Cognition*): A bunch of people were presented with a small, incomplete line drawing of a bicycle, and asked to fill in the rest of the frame, the pedals, and the chain. These were people who occasionally rode bicycles, but they saw them every day, and when asked how well they knew how bicycles work, they rated themselves as about 4.5 out of 7.

Almost half of them drew bicycles that weren't just wrong, but that would never work. Chains connected to both wheels. Frames that didn't allow the front wheel to turn. Pedals directly attached to both wheels. 40% of them couldn't even *recognize* the correct schematic of a bicycle.

The crazy thing? When the same test was given to a bunch of experts, people who literally rode their bicycles every day, 13% of them made the same mistakes, even though they were much more confident in their knowledge.

Your knowledge is almost never as complete as you think it is.

So, when we say prepare, we mean it. Try giving an explanation of whatever you're going to talk about when you're tabling out loud, either to a friend or an empty room. Figure out whether you actually know what you're talking about, and try to fill in any gaps you discover. Doing this before you go to table will make you look knowledgeable and feel (rightly) confident, and make the whole day better.

III. No plan survives first contact with reality

Prepare, but don't be inflexible. This goes for everything. You might show up and discover they've moved your location at the last second, or the young republicans got the spot next to you. Adapt as best you can.

For your spiels, be ready to change things if you find that something isn't working. Are you getting the same question over and over again? Try putting that information up front. Are people losing interest in some part of it? Trim that part down.

IV. Do's and Don'ts

Do:

- Smile
- Be concise
- Pay attention to how people react
- Listen to what people want to know
- Invite interested people to public DSA events or general meetings
- Bring friends
- Bring water
- Have fun!

Don't:

- Argue
- Lecture
- Get provoked
- Invite non-members to events that are really only for members (e.g., steering committee meetings)
- Ignore people passing by to talk to whoever's helping out at the table with you
- Talk a lot about non-DSA stuff (a little is fine)
- "Tough it out" (take a break if you need it. Fainting or having a panic attack isn't good outreach)

Tabling Checklist

Materials

- ☐ A table
- ☐ A Miami DSA banner if possible, or a poster and a way to present it if not
- ☐ Tabling materials (available at miamidsa.org/resources)
 - ☐ Many copies of general outreach flyer, ideally multilingual
 - ☐ A few copies of the most current newsletter with upcoming events
 - ☐ Something event-specific from a relevant WG or team (ideally)
- ☐ Sign-up sheet or other way to collect names and contact info for potential new members (e.g., tablet or laptop with google form)
- ☐ Water, Sunscreen
- ☐ Buttons, Stickers, etc.

Immaterials

- ☐ A practiced thirty-second response to “What’s this?”
- ☐ A practiced one-minute response to “What’s this and why is it here?”
- ☐ A practiced two- to three-minute response to “What’s this, why is it here, and why should I care?”