

Frequently Asked Questions

Chapter NOW MER (Mothering) Task Force

Why should my NOW chapter start it's own Mothers' Economic Rights (Mothering) Task Force?

As we state in our mission, we believe that "every mother is a working mother". This statement is as true now as when it was originally coined by our NOW founders. Keeping with this philosophy, the creation of a chapter MER (Mothering NOW) Task Force can benefit your chapter in several ways:

- Give mothers of young children in your community a forum. Show these mothers new ways to become politically active.
- Increase your chapter membership by appealing to this untapped feminist demographic.
- Engage your whole community with new events and outreach programming.
- Expand media presence for the chapter on a pro-women/family issue.
- Boost your chapter funding; more opportunities for support from area businesses through event sponsorship, chapter newsletter ad buys and general donations.
- Re-energize NOW's image by dispelling tired misconceptions about the relationship between feminism and motherhood; demonstrating that both are quite compatible and, in fact, are inextricably linked.

Great. How do we get started?

Bring this idea to your NOW Chapter Board. After you create a MER (Mothering NOW) Task Force, then consider who would be the best candidate in your chapter to lead the group. Hopefully someone will volunteer to be your chapter's Task Force chairperson.

Now it's time to get acquainted with the issues surrounding Mothers' Economic Rights. There is wealth of information online. Download tools and handouts from the NOW-NJ MER web page. Call the MER (Mothering NOW) Task Force coordinator with any questions you have about the promotional material, working with the press and general organizing. (See "The Mothers' Economic Rights Reading List" & Elizabeth Bauchner's article "A Mother's Place is in the Women's Movement")

Set a date a few months in advance for your first MER (Mothering NOW) Task Force meeting. Give yourselves enough lead time to promote the new group. Get suggestions for meetings from your chapter members, business associates, other activists. Announce the creation of your new Task Force in your local press.

Figure out how your particular community relates to the issues of concern to Mother's Economic Rights. Town council minutes and PTA meetings could be helpful as a resource. Observe the awareness level of Work/Life policy practiced by your local businesses. Look at the various civic and mothers' groups and get a sense of what the hot buttons are in your town or county (See the "Mothers' Organization Resource List". If you find other groups in your community let us know so that we can expand the database). Make a list of your local contacts for mothers' groups and when you are closer to date of your first meeting, get in touch with these group leaders and invite them to attend Task Force meetings.

Who is the typical Mothering NOW Task Force member?

The MER (Mothering NOW) Task Force seems to attract the same women who joined NOW in college or early in their careers. These are the same women who may have fallen away from the organization as they became too involved in their day-to-day lives to be active NOW members. They consider themselves feminists and are ready to get politically active again or at least are hungry to discuss the issues.

There are members who have altered their salaried workforce status due to the systemic societal bias against unpaid care giving work. They are disappointed with their treatment at the hands of corporate anti-care giver policies. Prior to their transitioning within the paid labor force, they may not have considered themselves feminists. They were surprised to find out that NOW does speak to their needs and are intrigued by the prospect of speaking with other women who have gone through similar experiences.

Because of the MER (Mothering NOW) Task Force's focus on Mothers' Economic Rights and the daytime nature of the meetings, we'll have many women attend who are transitioning between the salaried workforce and their role as unpaid caregiver. Many of these women will have infants and/or small children. They are attracted by the prospect of like-minded community, conversation and childcare at meetings.

How do we get new people to attend these meetings?

First, consider your own NOW chapter membership. How many times have you wondered where all of these inactive members went? Is it possible that some of these women may not come to meetings because they are busy working and/or raising their kids? Your new MER (Mothering NOW) Task Force is a great opportunity for "in-reach" -- use your NOW chapter meetings, your newsletter, mailing list or phone list and get the buzz going.

When venturing out into the larger community, in most cases, the best way to get people interested in attending meetings is word of mouth. One MER (Mothering NOW) Task Force member who is involved in another mothers' group can do amazing recruitment. Possibly the most appealing things to new members is that they can gather with like-minded moms and just talk. In most social situations, women can't discuss issues like these. In too many instances, a playgroup isn't the best forum for sharing one's views on

politics and feminism. We can provide members with a venue for open discussion on women's issues and motherhood.

In developing your recruitment and promotional strategy, brainstorming is key. What's going on in your town? Who is placing notices in the local paper and flyering the local supermarket? Who is selling cookies to raise money for new uniforms? Who is sending you mail about community events? See the "Networking" supplement for suggestions.

Are there resources to help us advertise the meetings, like templates for flyers and press releases?

Yes. Please go to the NOW-NJ web site. There you will find downloadable tools for meetings (handouts, templates, meeting plans, etc). You can also refer to the NOW National website chapter leadership resources (<http://www.now.org/chapters/states.html>) and / or NOW.org action center "media guide"(<http://www.capwiz.com/now/dbq/media/>).

For the more web savvy among you, you could start your own Yahoo Group (for example call it: mychaptermotheringnow@yahoo.com) or website for the purpose of recruitment or cataloging information about caregiver's rights and NOW. It's a great idea to invite new members and offer them the opportunity to build community online.

Ultimately, there are lots of things that you can do. Each MER (Mothering NOW) Task Force will find its own rhythm and way of doing things. Your ideas will make this movement grow.

How should the meetings be structured?

There is no set way that a meeting should be structured. The only specification is that the subject matter deals with Mothers' Economic Rights. Obviously the number of people in attendance will influence what you do at your meeting. Even if you advertise a certain type of meeting, it's a good idea to have at least one back-up plan. Bad weather, summer break/holiday vacation plans and cold & flu season can wreak havoc with mothers' schedules. (Check out "Meeting Formats" for ideas.)

What topics should be covered at these meetings?

Among the MER (Mothering NOW) Task Force's goals are education about and advocating for Mothers' Economic Rights. This subject matter casts a surprisingly wide net; it's not restricted to Work/Life issues but reaches into topics as diverse as the economics of mother's health, and the financial implications of early childhood education. For a detailed list of possible topics, please read the supplements "Programming Suggestions" and "Suggested Reading." You could comfortably program a few years worth of meetings with the research and literature currently available on mothering, feminism and the economics of motherhood.

Mine is a veteran/or university chapter. We probably won't have any interest from our current membership.

Not necessarily. If you have a mature membership, if they have any friends, relatives or neighbors who say can't come to evening meetings because of their obligations to raising kids. There might be a daughter or niece that could see this as a call back to action. Several of the Morris County NOW Mothering members came from veteran member's word of mouth networking. It really works.

The same goes for university NOW chapters/women's studies programs. Consider the number of women graduate students who juggle work and family. These same women might find the theory behind the current Mother's Economic Rights movement as compelling as the prospect of community building. It is of the greatest importance to get feminist scholars in on this discussion and we should encourage this at every opportunity.

Also, remember that to keep NOW strong, we need to grow membership. Please contact us and maybe we can find a solution for your particular situation.

We don't have anyone in our chapter to lead this Mothering Task Force. Any suggestions?

We have been working to get the word out on this on a statewide level. There might be someone in your community outside of your chapter that will seize upon the Task Force leadership role. Please contact us and let's talk about strategy.

Our chapter's funds are low. Can we financially support a Mothering Task Force?

Certainly there will be some initial output of time and money into the development of any new endeavor. As an experienced leader of a non-profit organization, you are probably adept at getting a lot of mileage out of a little financial outlay. The potential for growing your chapter and for getting your chapter local press should be attractive. With the MER (Mothering NOW) Task Force you may find new ways of encouraging local businesses to sponsor events or purchase advertising in your newsletter, helping you to defray any minimal costs.

We don't have a public place to meet.

Both existing Mothering Task Forces started in their founders' living rooms. You don't have to secure a public place. The convenience and safety of a location like a library, community center or church rec room is something to strive for but not starting out with one should not be a deterrent. Just meet.

We've had our first meeting! Now what?

Congratulations! Now we need your feedback. We want to assist you in making your chapter Mothers' Economic Rights (Mothering NOW) NOW Task Force strong. Let us know what worked and what didn't.

Help us make this as great as we think it will be. We believe that "every mother is a working mother" and that the National Organization for Woman should continue to thrive in its mission and goals. We also believe that these Mothers' Economic Rights (Mothering NOW) Task Forces will help us accomplish "the great, unfinished business of the women's movement" (A. Crittenden). Thank you for all of your amazing effort. Let's keep it going.

For more information regarding NOW-NJ Mothers' Economic Rights Task Force, Chapter MER TF development, or to receive additional action kits, please contact Laurie Pettine at mertf_info@nownj.org or 973-214-2643.