GUIDE

Can a school club put its national logo on a custom shirt?

An FFA chapter, a Key Club or a National Honor Society chapter wears a name its national office owns. Here is what each one requires before a printer touches that mark, and the point where a custom club shirt stops being the right tool.

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Most club shirts belong entirely to the school: the school name, the mascot, the colors, a line only members understand. A chapter of a national organization adds one more owner. When the design carries the FFA emblem, the Key Club wordmark or the National Honor Society name, the national office decides who may print it, and for some programs a custom order from a local shop is exactly what the rules forbid.

Who owns the logo on a chapter shirt?

The national organization does, and the school's approval does not stand in for it. The National FFA Organization licenses its marks through Affinity Licensing. Key Club belongs to the Kiwanis family, whose marks Kiwanis International licenses through Affinity Consultants. The National Honor Society's brand guidelines say its program names and logos "are registered trademarks owned by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP)." A chapter borrows these marks. It does not own them, so the advisor's yes and the principal's yes settle the school's marks and nothing more.

What does FFA require for a chapter shirt?

A licensed vendor. The FFA trademark FAQ says chapters "do not need to be licensed, but they must use a licensed vendor to create products bearing the FFA trademark. The vendor must have a license, not the stakeholder." The rule holds even when the shirts are for chapter

use and nothing is resold, and the FAQ adds that each design using the FFA marks must be approved before production.

Chapters can ask for exceptions, but not for shirts. The FFA license exception page states that "t-shirts would never be an approved exemption because we have thousands of t-shirts available from ShopFFA and our licensees."

A favorite local printer can still do the job by becoming a licensee. FFA's licensing page lists the steps: an Affinity Gateway account, an online application, a $50 application fee, a certificate of insurance for at least a $1 million policy, and a signed license agreement. That takes time, so start it well before the chapter needs shirts.

One path skips the outside vendor entirely. FFA offers an SAE and Chapter Enterprise License, with no application fee and no royalty, for products a chapter makes itself, such as shirts from an ag shop's own heat press. The FAQ is firm on the limit: the chapter "may not outsource production to a non-licensed vendor and simply act as a sales channel." Questions go to licensing@ffa.org.

What about Key Club?

Kiwanis International's licensing FAQ says goods bearing Kiwanis family marks, Key Club among them, must come from licensed vendors, whether the items are made for club use or for resale. The vendor applies for the license through Affinity, not the club, and licensed goods carry an "Official Licensed Product" hologram decal. A club checking a printer can ask for its license and look for that decal on the finished product.

Where does a custom shirt stop working?

At the National Honor Society. NASSP's logo usage and brand guidelines allow chapters to "use official program names and logos for non-commercial educational and promotional purposes" without prior approval, such as on a newsletter or a ceremony program. Merchandise is different. The page says "official merchandise is distributed exclusively through our store," names program apparel among those items, and states that "No individual, chapter, or vendor may produce or source these items independently." It names the usual workaround directly: "Independent production or third-party sourcing (e.g., via Amazon or local printers) is strictly prohibited."

A chapter that wants something custom has to submit an official request before production. Approval is discretionary, "granted for a specific product, vendor, and quantity," and requests are typically processed within 10 business days. The same guidelines cover the National Junior Honor Society, the National Elementary Honor Society and the National Association of Student Councils, so a student council that wants to wear the national association's marks follows the same process.

For an honor society chapter, then, a custom shirt with the program name or emblem is the wrong starting point. The official store comes first, and any custom request is a single approval for a single order, not a standing permission.

What can the club print freely?

Everything that belongs to the school and the members. A design built on the school name, the mascot, the colors, the year and the members' own lines stays outside every national program above, because it carries none of their marks. The school's own marks still need the school's approval, which is why a club should get written approval for the mascot before the design starts.

So the first design question for a chapter is whether the shirt needs the national mark at all. If it must say FFA or carry the emblem, use ShopFFA or a licensed vendor. If it must say National Honor Society, start with the NASSP store or file the request at least two weeks ahead. If the members want a shirt that is theirs, build it around the school.

How does this change the order?

Name the club's national affiliation in the first message to the designer, so the mockup is built to the rule that applies before anyone falls in love with a draft. Impact SpiritWear designers build FFA chapter designs to FFA brand policy, and every club design can carry the school name, mascot and colors. Custom shirts cannot be returned once they are printed, so the right answer costs nothing before the mockup and a full order after it. Get your free mockup or call 800-704-5578, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm Pacific.

Impact Spiritwear

800-704-5578 impactspiritwear.com

Impact SpiritWear designs custom school spirit shirts for elementary schools, high schools, clubs, classes, bands and fundraisers.