

# Save the Cactus supporters get organized

*Group drafts plan to save, fund iconic music venue.*

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About 100 grass-roots supporters trying to keep the iconic Cactus Cafe from closing met on Saturday with plans to save and make profitable the landmark music venue.

Gathered on the patio of Maria's Taco Xpress, the organizers of Save the Cactus Cafe passed out a draft plan to keep the cafe in the student union of the University of Texas.

Already, the group — formed in response to the university's recent decision to close the cafe — established the Web site [SavetheCactusCafe.org](http://SavetheCactusCafe.org) and a Facebook page with more than 20,000 fans.

University officials announced that the Cactus Cafe, a launch pad for such musicians as Lyle Lovett, and a long-running program of informal classes will cease operations in August as part of a larger cost-cutting effort.

Save the Cactus Cafe's aim is to get UT to reverse its decision as well as to provide ongoing funding for operations and programs there, said Reid Nelson, one of the organizers.

The group's organizers are developing and naming a nonprofit for the movement; they began collecting checks Saturday. They said they were also reaching out to students for support. Under the group's plan, students would be given greater access and control in management, booking and performing.

Organizers also hope to offer cafe internships, a student artist-in-residence program and marketing projects to increase revenue of the cafe.

"I've been promoting events for 20 years, and I've never had a response that was this positive, this fast, or this expansive," said organizer Wiley Koepp. "That makes me extremely optimistic that we can make an impact."

Only a handful of students attended the event, including the university's student body President Liam O'Rourke.

"I don't want it to seem as if the university's union board, especially the students on it, aren't willing to listen," O'Rourke said of his attendance.

O'Rourke said the Cactus will be used as a venue for student performers, who "haven't had the platform for decades." Under the university's new plan, a formal student community will manage the cafe, setting the agenda for the room and will be in charge of booking and management, O'Rourke said.

"A lot of student musicians want access to that room because of the history," O'Rourke said. "The university's union board saw the opportunity to give students space they haven't had access to in decades."

But Save the Cactus supporters hope their plan to make operations profitable and make up for shortfalls in the cafe's operating budget is enough to keep the venue in its current form.

"I, and my office, will do everything in my power to keep the Cactus open," said state Rep. Elliot Naishtat, D-

Austin, whose district includes UT. "This is something important to the Forty Acres and the whole community."

Attendees broke into groups and began signing on to committees to fundraise, organize volunteers and organize other events.

"We're going to continue to mobilize and recruit more and more people," Nelson said.

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