



## STARTING AN ORGANIZATION

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There are two basic reasons for starting an organization:

1. a group of people see a need
2. their needs are not being met by an existing organization.

The group should consider the following:

1. What is the purpose of the organization?
2. What will the organization do?
3. Who is likely to join?
4. Is a new organization really needed, or is there an existing organization?

Steps to starting:

1. A **founding committee** of four to twelve people should be formed. This committee will initiate action, seek out alternatives and present firm suggestions on how to proceed. The group may arrange an open public meeting to see if other people are interested.
2. A **constitution committee** should be established to present proposals to the founding committee for approval. This is necessary to develop a structural framework to guarantee the organization's continuity. The constitution and by-laws provide the means for making the intentions of the group concrete. It specifies the roles and method of appointment of the officers, the procedures for decision-making and methods for achieving the desired objectives.
3. Changes to the constitution may be voted in by the membership and included in the final version by the committee. Once the constitution has been approved, this short-term committee is disbanded and its members go on to other activities e.g. program planning, fundraising, etc.
4. A **temporary executive** should be appointed. Interested and qualified people should be actively recruited to be members of the executive. Usually a temporary executive serves for a three-month term, then a nine-month term and then is elected annually after that.

### STRUCTURE OF THE ORGANIZATION

Members are the most important part of the organization. The organization exists in order to meet the needs of its members. Members are responsible for selecting the executive and other

committee chairmen. The strength of the organization depends on how the members' skills are utilized.

**Executive** members are elected from the membership (may be appointed) to guide and help members carry out the objectives. The executive is usually made up of past-president, president, vice-president(s), and secretary-treasurer.

**Committees** may be permanent or short-term depending on their purposes. A committee should be dissolved when it has achieved its objectives.

**Board of Directors** is made up of members who advise on policy matters, guide the day to day operations of the organization and act as a liaison with public.

### Constitution and By-Laws

The constitution of an organization states the purpose of the organization. It also states the structure and methods of operation of the organization. Power to create by-laws is usually given in the constitution and represents a rule book for day to day procedures.

Each member of an organization should have access to an up-to-date copy of the constitution and by-laws.

#### Constitution Checklist – items commonly included:

- Name of the organization
- Objectives of the organization
- Address of the registered office of the organization
- Distribution of powers within the organization
- Criteria for regular membership, including voting eligibility
- Criteria dictating voting powers of delegates or representatives in multiple level organizations
- Titles, duties and length of terms for officers
- Terms of reference for the board of directors and/or the executive committee including voting powers
- Delegation of authority
- A process to amend the constitution
- A statement that the organization must not be operated for a gain by the members (for non-profit organization)

#### **By-Laws Checklist** – items commonly included:

- Method for admission of regular members (individual or groups).
- Criteria for any other classes or subdivisions of memberships such as associate, family or honorary.
- Conditions and procedures for the termination of membership.
- Procedures for election and removal of officers, board members, and chairs of standing committees.
- Procedures for election and terms of reference of standing committees.
- Procedures for setting membership dues.
- Procedures for calling and conducting annual, regular, special and telephone meetings.
- The number constituting a quorum for general meetings, board meetings, and committee meetings.
- The authority for rules of order.
- Methods of voting, including the proportion of votes required for important decisions.
- Conditions for employment and termination of staff and their status within the organization.
- Procedures for amending the by-laws.

#### **Incorporation**

This involves the granting of a charter, letters patent, or a memorandum of association by government legislation. Incorporation gives the organization a legal existence which is separate from that of individual members. This means that the organization can enter into contracts with other corporate bodies or individuals and can sue or be sued in the courts. An organization with substantial financial and professional responsibilities and which employs staff should seek incorporation as it offers protection for the public, the membership, the executive and its staff.

It is wise to obtain legal counsel when applying for incorporation as the process may be complicated.

A constitution for incorporated organizations should include:

1. Regulations for the audit of accounts.
2. Regulations for the custody and use of the organization's seal.
3. Regulations for the preparation and safe keeping of the registry of members, minutes of general, board and committee meetings, financial reports and other documents.
4. A statement of the time and place at which the books and records of the organization can be inspected by the members.
5. The procedures for the execution and certification of contracts, deeds, bills of exchange and other documents on behalf of the organization.
6. A statement indicating whether proxies are permitted.

#### **RESPONSIBILITIES OF OFFICERS IN AN ORGANIZATION**

##### **President or Chairman**

- presides at meetings, maintains order and keeps the meeting moving

- prepares the agenda and adheres to it by accepting only discussion on the topic from the floor
- starts and adjourns meetings on time
- knows the rules of meeting procedure (including parliamentary procedure)
- is aware of the priority of business items and schedules them appropriately
- is prepared to represent the organization
- avoids giving own opinion when in the chair – but is prepared to summarize and accept the wishes of the meeting
- delegates responsibility and authority

##### **Vice-President**

- learns the duties of the President and fulfills that role when the President is absent
- assists the President whenever possible

##### **Secretary**

- handles all correspondence of the organization as a whole
- keeps a record of the meetings and has them approved at the next meeting
- presents a summary of correspondence (the full correspondence being on hand for reference)
- is prepared to make recommendations as to actions, through familiarity with papers, correspondence, etc.

##### **Treasurer**

- receives all monies due and issues receipts when required
- informs the meeting of bills paid, expenses and receipts – especially identifying large sums
- prepares financial statements where required

#### **RESPONSIBILITIES OF MEMBERS**

Just as the executive has specific duties and responsibilities, members have responsibilities to themselves and to their organization.

Members are expected to:

- be on time for meetings. For every minute of delay, multiply it by the number of people at the meeting to realize the total time wasted at the meeting.
- attend regularly to keep aware of the current business.
- become familiar with meeting procedures and follow the rules.
- seek ways to move discussion along, e.g. avoid repeating opinions and examples already given.
- understand each motion before voting on it.
- be willing to volunteer.

Reference: *Procedures for Meetings and Organizations*, M. Kay Kerr and Hubert King; Carswell Legal Publications 1984.

*Getting People Together*. Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Culture 1982.

*Community Organizations Notes for Community Leaders*. Ontario Ministry of Culture and Recreation 1976.