

INTERNATIONAL ORTHOPTIC ASSOCIATION

A Guide for Establishing a National Orthoptic Association



Preface

This guide is intended to enable leaders in countries where national associations do not exist to establish orthoptic associations. This publication may also be used by the board and staff of existing national orthoptic associations to manage their organizations more effectively. We hope that this resource guide will reduce the learning curve, avoid re-inventing the wheel and strengthen national associations around the world.

It should be noted, however, that there is no single formula for success. Contexts and conditions vary and determine what is needed and possible. For that reason, we have focused on providing guidelines based on the experiences of existing national associations. Any newly formed constitution should reflect the local conditions and requirements of each country. We advise all associations to act in accordance with local civil procedures law concerning organization of associations.

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A Guide for Establishing a National Orthoptic Association

Why Develop a National Orthoptic Association?

IN THIS SECTION:

- What is a National Orthoptic Association?
- What are the benefits of having a national orthoptic association?
- Key questions to consider before establishing an association

What is a National Orthoptic Association?

National orthoptic associations are country-based membership networks whose reason for existing is to represent the collective interests of its orthoptic members. National orthoptic associations play a critical part in bringing regional, state and provincial professional orthoptic groups together. They exist to serve the needs of its members. National associations serve as vehicles for a constructive and coordinated voice for the orthoptic profession. They are well placed to conduct a conversation with government, health authorities and other eye health professional organizations, and are in a position of strength to influence policy. National associations generally play a lead role in addressing issues that have impact on the profession as a whole. In issues that are more specific to a sub-specialties (e.g. orthoptists who assist in strabismus surgery), national associations may play more of a facilitating role by providing a forum for members with similar interests to collaborate, and by supporting member's initiatives.

What are the benefits of having a National Orthoptic Association?

There are many possible benefits to setting up a national orthoptic association. The range of benefits are provided depend on the focus and services of the orthoptic association.

Potential Benefits:

Facilitating regular communication between members, and orchestrating opportunities for face-to-face discussions and collaboration

Strengthening the message of orthoptists by providing a collective voice which is more likely to be heard and acknowledged as legitimate by others, particularly decision makers

Raising and maintaining the profile and legitimacy of the orthoptic profession

Helping members and eye care at large by identifying and fostering best orthoptic practices

Helping to build the capacity of orthoptists by sharing skills, knowledge and information through Congresses, symposiums, seminars, workshops, break-out sessions at conferences and online continuing education courses

Serving as platforms to collectively monitor developments that affect the orthoptic profession

Providing a platform to consider and develop viable alternatives for policy makers, and to create greater opportunities to influence government and health policy

Protecting and strengthening the rights and independence of orthoptists

Creating networking opportunities that enable sub-specialty groups working in the same field or on related causes to collaborate and launch joint actions (i.e. researchers, orthoptic educators, low vision specialists etc.)

Providing career and job opportunities

Providing benefits to members such as free publications and discounts on CDs, journals, videos/DVDs, discounts on conference fees or special rates on related expenses, such as hotel reservations, scholarships or bursaries for researchers and students and websites with “members-only” sections that provide access to a variety of databases and message boards, as well as list-serve subscriptions so that you can be notified via e-mail about upcoming events and special activities that may not be open to the general public

Providing civic leadership: As an individual orthoptist, you may not have the time or resources to sponsor a charitable event, partner with an educational institution or otherwise participate in community activities. But if your professional organization is active in civic and philanthropic ventures, you can become involved in many worthwhile projects.

Key questions to ask before establishing an association

1. What are the major concerns/ challenges/ opportunities facing orthoptics in your country?
2. What is the burning issue motivating the establishment of an association?
3. Is there an advantage in addressing these issues collectively?
4. Are there other organizations better situated to fill the proposed functions?
5. What sectoral and regional organizations need to be approached to achieve equitable representation and legitimacy?
6. Who needs to be part of forming the national association?
7. What challenges should be anticipated?
8. What other issues could you address collectively?
9. What will be the role of members?
10. How will you deal with disagreements and conflict?
11. Who will be threatened by the establishment of a national association and what is your strategy to mitigate this?
12. Who will be enthused by the establishment of a national association and what is your strategy to harness this energy?
13. Who will provide the initial resources?
14. How will the activities be sustained?
15. What lessons can you draw on from other national associations globally?

CHAPTER TWO

The Process for Establishing an Association

IN THIS SECTION:

- Strategic Intent
- Core Founding Group
- Action plan for launching a new association
- Financing the launch of a new association

Strategic Intent

The first and most important step is to know what you are intending to achieve and why do you want to do it. This is referred to as your **strategic intent**. Associations with no clear reason for existing do not add value to the profession and generally do not survive.

What is the business of the association you plan to form? Is it to provide a political voice for the profession, is it for continuing education, is it for scientific advancement for example?

Strategic Intent has a hierarchy; Vision, Mission, Goals and Objectives.



An organization needs to be able to define its **vision**—its view of **WHAT** that association could or should be like.

Associations also needs to know what it plans to do to turn their vision into a reality – i.e. its **mission**. Closely linked to the vision and mission is the question of values, and of the shared belief about the way you plan to operate. An organization’s values establish a culture of how your organization will behave towards each other. Together these provide a high-level framework for the associations operation. Good associations will revisit their mission, vision and core beliefs every few years to ensure they are still relevant.

Among the most important challenges confronting founding members of a national association is to set realistic goals for the organization and to agree on priorities. **Goals** denote what an association hopes to accomplish in a period of time in the future. An association's **objectives** are the ends which state specifically how the goals will be achieved. Objectives are concrete and specific in contrast to goals that are generalized. The “founding” members of a national associations must articulate very clearly the proposed mission, objectives and initial activities of the national association.

Having a clear vision and mission, goals and objectives helps keep an organization focused, simplifies decision making, and prevents too much time and resources being wasted on trying to do too much.

Core Founding Group

A newly formed association takes time, dedication and coordinated effort to grow. It requires the willing involvement of orthoptists in establishing the structures and devising policies to help the association to flourish.

It is important to secure the participation of strategic, powerful and respected leaders within the orthoptic profession in your country; efforts also need to be made to attract representatives of orthoptic communities from all regions of your country. Investing in this early outreach may be time-consuming, but engaging all sectors of the country will strengthen the association's ability to become an effective and more fully representative body.

Tips when setting up a core group:

- Try to involve individuals with a diversity of skills (e.g. strategic, planning, media, team building)
- Involve a member with experience in interfacing with the state as most new organizations need to engage with and establish their legitimacy with the state.
- Ensure you have a mix of recognized leaders in the profession and people willing to devote some time to do the work needed
- Ensure you involve people who are good at building networks and relationships
- Secure a person with legal expertise to assist you in drafting the necessary legal documents (it may be necessary to hire a solicitor for this purpose)
- It would also be advantageous to secure a member with some financial expertise (has acted as a treasurer for other organizations) who could advise on establishment of a Foundation and or the securing of non-profit organizational status

Once the Core Group is established:

It is important to develop clear terms of reference for this core team, specifying: the group's mandate; the envisaged scope of work; core team member responsibilities; as well as the decisions making processes.

Different Roles Needed in Most Core Group

Core Team Coordinator Guides the process and leads the team. Provides the team with some consistency, and a person to go to. Keeps people in touch with one another and keeps plans on track.

Financial Management Manages all income and expenses. Retains accurate and complete records of all elements of the emerging operations.

Legal Researches legal documents and various statuses to consider. Drafts legal documents, e.g. the assoc. constitution for team framework

Fund Raising Brainstorms sources for funding. Fosters relations with all relevant parties. Secures investments to support civil society and the new vision. Prepares initial budgets and proposals for foundations, governments, international bodies and individual donors.

Membership Researches various membership structures, criteria, and regulations. Drafts and presents research to team. Commences outreach strategies. Tests perceptions.

Media Relations Develops a media relations strategy and a public education plan. Develops relations with all relevant parties. Drafts materials to attract media coverage.

Government Liaison Liaises with all levels of government, including with standing committee members and department staff. Uses contacts to open up access to government. Find champions and committee workers in government.

Action Plan for Launching a New Association

Once you have decided on your strategic intent and have a core team who can drive the process, you need an action plan for launching the association. This can take many forms, for example an event or general conference, or a mail out to potential members etc. Regardless of the agreed action, you need to decide who will do what when. You also need to be clear who you are targeting with each action - be it potential members, decision makers, donors, partners or the general public. Finally, you need to ensure the selected action is best suited to achieve your strategic goals and raise the initial profile of the national association.

Questions to ask:

- How will you launch the association?
- What impact do you anticipate?
- Are there other actions you could engage in which would achieve the same impact?
- How will the core group respond to the action?
- Who will be involved?

- Who will you target as possible members and how will you recruit and involve these members?
- Are there organizations who you want to have support your association launch?
- Groups you want to partner with?
- How will government respond to the launch of your association?
- How will other ophthalmic organizations and allied health organizations respond to the launch of your association?
- How will the media respond to the launch of your organization?
- Do you anticipate any opposition to the launch of your new association?
- Once you have completed the launch of your organization what will do you next?
- How will you sustain interest in the association?

Financing the Launch of an Association

In their initial stages most national associations operate through the generosity of participants who provide donations in-kind, largely through giving their time to the development of the association. Other such contributions include providing work and meeting space, access to equipment and the donation of specialized skills. As the activities of the association expand, financial support may also come from donors, membership fees and services. The core team plays a significant part in securing early investments to support the association. Members of the core team can use their networks to identify and build relations with various sources for funding. This may include applying for or lobbying for more organization and sector wide funding. In the initial stages, if the organization is not incorporated or does not yet have official registration, a member of the core team who is registered may apply for charitable donations or public funds on behalf of the association.

Potential sources of funding to set up a national association

- Core group/ members in kind contributions
- Core group/ members donations
- Donor grant
- Government grant
- Bequest
- Proceeds from a fund-raising event

CHAPTER THREE

The Legal Structure of a National Orthoptic Association

IN THIS SECTION:

- Should you register your national association?
- Advantages of being a not for profit organization
- Disadvantages of being a not for profit organization

Should you register your national association?

Once the national association has been initiated, the next step is generally to legalize the structure of your new association. Do explore the legal requirements for registering your association early in your formation because they will impact on what structure your board will have, what the focus of your association can be, and your financial reporting and accountability. The legal requirements for registration will be governed by the national legal and regulatory environment of the country where you establish your association. Even if your group is fairly informal, you will find that you need to agree some kind of legal structure if you want to open a bank account and/or apply for funding. You're agreed legal structure will govern who, in the eyes of the law, is responsible for the activities of your organization, and different legal structures come with different legal responsibilities. It is therefore important to understand the regulations and the implications for incorporated non-profit organizations in the country in which the national association wishes to operate.

In some countries national associations may have no choice as to how they are to register, while in others a number of options might be available such as charitable organization, not-for-profit companies, civic association, foundation, etc. Also sponsoring bodies, such as foundations or government departments, may specify the regulatory or legal status required for associations to be eligible for funding.

Advantages of being a not-for-profit organization

Not-for-profit status may:

Increase your credibility because of the standards you are obligated to meet by government

You become a legal entity that is cable of owing legal title to real or personal property.

Will exempt your organization from paying taxes

Allow you to issue tax receipts for donations

Allow your organization to apply for funding from charitable foundations and, in some cases, the government

Allow you to receive grants from other organizations

Provides some indemnity for your association officers

Disadvantages of being a not-for-profit organization

Not-for-profit status may:

As a legal entity you have obligations to meet which include government filing requirements related to annual membership and director's names or changes to your head office.

You will have requirements to maintain minutes of all meetings and there will be regulations regarding how your accounts are maintained and audited.

There may be some costs involved if you require legal advice to become incorporated or registered.

CHAPTER FOUR

Governance of an Association

IN THIS SECTION:

- Governing Board
- Secretariat
- Types of Association Meetings

Association Governance

Governance refers to all of the processes of governing an association. Who is running the association, what are the policies in place, and what continuous monitoring is in place to ensure policies are carried out. The need for **governance** exists anytime a group of people come together to accomplish an end.

Governance is a team task – no one person has the skills, wisdom and credibility to do it alone. The Governing Team may be known as the board of trustees, board of directors or management committee. Whatever the name, it will act as the ultimate authority in an organization.

Governing Board

A governing board is an elected or appointed group of individuals who will have the following primary obligations:

- Developing and managing the organization's strategic planning and direction;
- Gauging external constraints and harnessing opportunities;
- Providing financial stewardship and oversight;
- Ensuring transparency;
- Focusing on services to and monitoring members;
- Striving for sustainability;
- Managing the elements of self-governance

Unlike the initial core team who got together to launch the association, the appointment of board members requires some kind of transparent and **democratic process**. The specific process of either electing or appointing the board varies from association to association.

Democratic Process

Associations are normally governed by democratic processes and should be seen to be democratic. Each member should have, and be seen to have, the ability by his or her vote to influence the management and decision making processes of the association. These democratic processes are important because they enable members to arrive at a consensus within the association, and they provide authority for those who speak outside its meetings on its behalf.

Board decision making

It is important to specify what latitude and authority the board has to make decisions on behalf of the entire membership. Clarifying decision-making processes enables things to get done most expeditiously. The national association may determine that different issues require different decision makers. The decision-making process may be expedited if some decisions rest with the executive committee or a sub-committee rather than the entire board. However some issues, such as the strategic direction should involve the whole board in the decision making. Others, for example a controversial campaign, may also require canvassing members.

Secretariat

The secretariat of an association are the individuals charged with administrative duties, maintaining records, and overseeing or performing secretarial duties (treasurer, secretary etc. – may also be referred to as the association officers). The secretariat may be volunteers or paid employees. While an association is involved in establishing itself and its reputation, it may be necessary for the board to be actively involved in all operations. However, in the longer term the management of a national association may be better served by the expertise of professional staff. The secretariat of the national association will then be mandated by the board to be the central coordinating body, and to conduct the day-to-day business of the association. Most operational decisions are delegated to the secretariat staff.

Associations should clearly stipulate the roles and responsibilities of members and the Secretariat and the consequences of breach of agreement

Types of Association Meetings

There are three common types of association meetings. It is important to understand the differences and functions they serve.

Board Meetings:

This is the regular business meeting of the elected Board of Directors (also known as trustees of the association). This meeting is held to carry out the regular running of the association. If staff is employed they might be invited to these meetings to advise or inform but they won't be able to vote.

Annual general meetings (AGMs):

Many associations have an AGM where the members approve the accounts and elect the trustees.

Your governing document should tell you when in the year to hold the AGM and how much notice you need to give. The notice period is usually three or four weeks.

Special Meetings:

Special Meetings are relatively uncommon. The reason a Special Meeting of the Members may be called is to vote on a unique or special initiative of the Association.

Key points to remember:

1. Have an agenda

Your governing document may tell you whether you should give advance notice of items to be discussed. Generally, if all present agree, it is possible to introduce a new item of business on the day of the meeting.

2. Deal with any conflicts of interest

If a board members decision-making could be influenced by their personal circumstances, or their involvement with another organisation, they are in a conflict of interest. Your governing document should outline how conflicts of interest are to be handled. Typically a board members with a conflict of interest is required to declare that conflict and abstain from voting.

3. Have a 'quorum' – enough people to make a decision

A quorum is the minimum number that must attend a meeting so that decisions can be made properly. Your governing document should tell you what your quorum is. If it doesn't, think about amending it.

If you set your quorum too high, any absences may make it difficult to have a valid meeting. If it's too low, a small minority of people may be able to impose its views unreasonably.

It is recommended that the quorum for a board' meeting is a minimum of one third of the total number of board members plus one. So an association with ten board members will have a quorum of four.

For general meetings, you should give careful thought to the quorum – it needs to be appropriate to the size of your association and the number and geographical spread of members.

4. Follow voting rules (if applicable)

Voting arrangements differ between associations and the type of meeting that you are holding. As a general rule, you should follow the instructions in your governing document.

At board meetings, generally only the board members vote on decisions. If a vote is evenly split, sometimes the chair has a second, casting vote to decide the matter, but only if the governing document says so. At general meetings, the members vote on decisions.

Usually a show of hands is enough to tell the result of a vote, but a poll can be used if not.

5. Keep minutes of every meeting

It is recommended that you keep accurate minutes of all meetings. They don't need to be word-for-word, but should give:

- the name of the association
- the type of meeting
- the date and time of the meeting
- the names of those present
- who chaired the meeting
- what capacity people attended in, such as trustee/board member or staff member
- any absences for agenda items due to conflicts of interest
- apologies for absence

The minutes should record exactly what was agreed, particularly for important or controversial decisions. For example:

- the exact wording of any resolution and who proposed it
- a summary of the discussion on each item of business
- information used to make decisions
- how many votes were made for and against, and how many didn't vote
- what action is needed and who is responsible for taking it
- the date, time and venue of the next meeting

Ideally, someone who isn't involved in the meeting should take the minutes. If a board member is taking the minutes, they should ensure they can also contribute actively to the discussion.

Minutes of board meetings should be available to all association board members. Professional advisers such as auditors may also ask to see them.

The minutes of a general meeting are usually made available to members (in the case of a charitable association they have to be) but you don't have to make them available to the public unless the charity's governing document says so.

CHAPTER FIVE

Membership

IN THIS SECTION:

- Categories of Membership
- Membership Services
- Membership Suspension

Categories of Membership

Given the diversity of associations and the people they serve, membership types and fee structures are anything but one size fits all. One association may have a simple three-tier membership structure such as Regular, Student, and Retired membership types, each with a specific membership fee. Other associations have memberships' categories of Individual and Organization, with several subcategories beneath them and different fees for each subcategory.

There are various reasons for having different categories of membership as the proposed classes listed below indicate to meet an association's varying needs. However the most significant relates to the matter of professional qualifications. In some countries the requirements for entry into the profession have been established by its members and/or government legislation. In others, orthoptic practitioners may enter from a variety of backgrounds. In some areas there is an evolution toward qualifications for orthoptic professionals but these have not yet been attained. In this situation provision is usually made giving non qualifying practitioners, who have been working in the field for a number of years, an opportunity to upgrade to professional status or to have membership status as long as they practice.

Sample Membership Categories

Full or Regular orthoptic membership: Category of member possessing orthoptic professional qualifications which it is necessary to define. They are typically defined by government regulatory bodies or by orthoptic registries, councils or boards.

General membership: Might be offered to those without the qualifications of an orthoptic professional. This class is used in situations where professional orthoptic qualifications are not clearly established in that country and individuals practicing come from varying orthoptic training programs. Membership rights may be limited, for example, general members may not be eligible to serve on the executive.

Student: Open to students in orthoptic studies, intended to attract future members of the profession to membership in the association. A lower or complimentary membership fee may be offered.

Retired: Open to orthoptists who have retired from active work. Usually a reduced membership fee is required.

Honorary: Category created to honor distinguished individuals who have made a major contribution to the profession or the association itself. It usually carries with it free membership and certain other benefits.

International: Usually a separate category with a subscription rate different from that charged to national members because of the physical difficulties of providing services to them over long distances and of identifying their prime requirements in international environments. It may be offered to members who relocate abroad but want to maintain a connection to their national orthoptic association.

Associate membership: May be offered to individuals who are interested and supportive of the profession who are not orthoptists (i.e. ophthalmologists). If offered it typically is provided with limited benefits for example they may not be able to serve on an executive and or hold voting privileges.

Institutional: A professional organization is ordinarily based on individual membership, however many of the services provided for personal members indirectly, and often directly, benefit institutions which employ individual members and it may be advantageous to provide institutional membership.

Affiliate membership: May be open to all non-government organizations and networks, national or international in nature, whose primary mandate is directly related and/or complimentary to the aims and objectives of your national orthoptic association.

Membership Services

Creating innovative ways to attract and retain members is a perpetual challenge faced by membership organisations and national associations. Potential members need to be sufficiently aware of the many benefits to be motivated to join a national association. Once a member they need to be convinced of the on-going benefits to remain active and renew their membership. It is important, therefore, to devise effective strategies in order to attract and retain interested members.

Each association provides its own unique services to members. Regardless of the services offered, it is important to remember the following points:

1. Regularly communicate with your members so you know what services they need and how you can support them
2. Listen to members' feedback on your services
3. Ensure that each service offered is of a consistently high quality. This builds trust in the association
4. Advertise the services so that members know what benefits they can derive

5. Clearly communicate your capabilities and do not raise unrealistic expectations that cannot be met

Membership Suspension

It is advisable to develop a mechanism for suspension of membership and to strike from membership an individual or institution that ceases to merit membership or that delays payment of fees beyond a stated period. It is important to ensure that such action, if taken, is legal.

Policies can be developed to deal with the following scenarios:

- Resignation of membership
- Nonpayment of membership dues
- Deceased members
- Members wishing to take a break from membership
- Termination due to disciplinary action
- Reinstatement of membership

CHAPTER SIX

Running an Association

IN THIS SECTION:

- Creating a Constitution
- Articles of Association
- Bylaws

Creating a Constitution

In basic terms a constitution is a document or “user manual” that spells out how the association is to be governed.

Associations may decide not to adopt a constitution and remain as an informal group. However, in most instances, it is not just an important device to ensure the effective running of your group; it is a “must have” legal requirement for any association wanting to maintain their status as a legal entity.

A written constitution will lay the foundations for the structure of your group and will allow it to develop within a concrete framework, ensuring that it stays on track and continues to successfully achieve its aims. A constitution is of paramount importance because:

- without a written understanding, people may become confused and things may not get done;
- it will act as a point of reference and help resolve any problems or controversy that may arise;
- it reassures the public and funding bodies that your group is properly run and that money is effectively managed;
- it illustrates that your group is democratic and accountable, with clear methods by which decisions are made.

Constitutions consist of two parts: **1. Articles of Association** (equivalent terms are used depending on the jurisdiction such as Articles of Incorporation, Memorandum of Incorporation, Articles of Organization) and **2. Bylaws**.

Articles of Association

The Articles of Association is a document that contains some basic information about an association and together with the bylaws forms its constitution.

- The name of your association
- The physical address of your association’s office
- The name and address for the association’s registered agent, the person or company designated to receive official papers for the association
- The purpose, mission and objectives of your association
- The directors of your organization and their address
- The specifics of your not profit status
- The length of time for which the association is being established (may be indefinite, or may be for a specific time frame)

Bylaws

The rules and guidelines that formally define your organizations governance arrangements. Your bylaws tell your members how your organization will be managed and how decision will be made.

Here is a list of the major items that typically appear under the bylaws:

- Who can be a member, under what conditions, how membership could be terminated
- How many directors can be on your board and how they will be selected
- What officers your organization will have and how they will be chosen (election, term, duties, resignation and removal)
- What type of meetings your organization will have and how they will be called (regular, special, annual)
- How many people must be present at meetings to do business (quorum)
- Voting rights of members
- How bylaws can be changed
- Whether certain kinds of decisions require special levels of approval or consent
- Providing indemnity for the directors
- How minutes are kept
- The fiscal year of the organization
- The standing committees of the board
- Audit
- Dissolution of the association (under what circumstances) and how the assets will be distributed

Bylaws will differ from association to association. They need to be tailored to the specific needs of your association. Bylaws are not that difficult to create and there are many “sample Bylaws” you can find on the web.

Concluding Remarks

Forming and managing a national association can be a complicated process. It often takes years of preparation and negotiation. National association increase ability to access more resources, obtain greater media exposure, and earn political support. This guide has been designed to underscore the spirit, knowledge and skills necessary to create a high functioning national association.

Enjoy the journey; the work is hard but the rewards are far reaching.