



Gloucestershire Association for Voluntary and Community Action

Membership Policy

January 2012

1 Principles of the Policy

1.1 Membership is a formal mechanism by which a voluntary body such as GAVCA is accountable. The nature and scope of its membership also helps to define what sort of organisation it is.

1.2 GAVCA aims to make its membership as wide as possible to ensure that its work is accountable to the whole voluntary and charitable sector that it was set up to support.

1.3 GAVCA wishes to ensure that all Voluntary and Community Organisations (VCOs) in Gloucestershire have an opportunity to be a member, whether as well as, or instead of, membership of another local Support and Development Organisation. (LSDO) in order to access the benefit of reduced rates for its training courses. GAVCA will therefore encourage membership from across the county, whether or not there is also a local LSDO in operation.

1.4 The eligibility for membership will be clearly defined in this policy in order to avoid case-by-case debate over potentially controversial organisations.

2 Criteria for Membership

2.1 Membership of GAVCA is open to all VCOs (see Appendix) whose area of benefit includes any part of Gloucestershire.

2.2 Where the organisation is a branch of a national or regional organisation, it must be delivering services specific to Gloucestershire .

2.3 Where an organisation runs several projects or services in the county, or is part of national or regional organisation, it is the countywide "parent" organisation that is eligible to become a member (e.g. the Gloucestershire office of a national charity). All staff in any of its projects or branches will therefore be eligible for members' benefits e.g. reduced rates for training.

2.4 Membership of another LSDO in the county does not preclude an organisation from becoming a member of GAVCA.

GAVCA wishes to support new initiatives at an early stage, which would not yet be able to meet tight criteria for membership. However, GAVCA also wishes to encourage good practice, and therefore organisations must show that they are committed to, the following, in order to obtain membership of GAVCA:

2.4.1 The organisation must have clearly defined aim(s), purpose or mission which must be consistent with GAVCA's own aims and objectives, including community benefit.

2.4.2 The organisation must have a committee or other such method of being accountable to its local members or users.

2.4.3 The organisation must have either a set of rules or a constitution. Nb. These could be the rules of the national parent organisation, not necessarily specific to the local branch if it a part of a larger national organisation.

2.4.4 Organisations must read, and sign that they agree with, and will abide by, GAVCA's Equalities and Diversity Policy and demonstrate, if required, their commitment to this policy. (Copy to be attached to the application form)

2.4.5 If the organisation has money, it must have a bank account in its name and keep financial records. If the organisation is a branch of a regional or national organisation it must have its own branch bank account and financial records.

3. Exclusions from Membership

3.1 Party political organisations are not consistent with GAVCA's charitable objectives.

3.2 Statutory bodies and quangos are not eligible to become members because they are not VCOs.

3.3 Individuals cannot be members of GAVCA unless for the purposed of being co-opted onto the Executive Committee in line with GAVCA's Memorandum and Articles..

3.4 Businesses run for profit cannot be members of GAVCA because they are not VCOs although social enterprises may be members if they meet all the criteria for membership.

4. Faith Groups

4.1 If a faith organisation is run by an accountable group or committee which meets the criteria for a VCO then this group or committee is entitled to be considered for membership. If the faith organisation does not have an accountable group or committee to govern it, it does not meet the criteria for a VCO.

4.2 Activities run by faith groups such as playgroups, youth clubs or lunch clubs should usually be regarded as projects or branches of the “parent” faith organisation which is eligible for membership..

5 Benefits of Membership

5.1 Organisations which are members of GAVCA are entitled to vote at the Annual General Meeting, as detailed in the Memorandum and Articles of Association (one vote per member organisation, given to the nominated representative).

5.2 In the case of a member organisation which is part of a larger regional or national organisation, the nominated representative must work within a Gloucestershire service.

5.3 Representatives of member organisations are eligible to sit on the Executive Committee of GAVCA.

5.3 As a developmental organisation, GAVCA will always need to work with initiatives that have not yet formed into a definite organisation or group. Therefore, unlike other bodies, it cannot confine its work to its members. However, members will be entitled to certain services, levels of support and reductions in charges where they are made, over the entitlements of non-members.

5.4 Once accepted into membership for the first time, all groups will receive an initial phone call from a member of the GAVCA staff to identify how GAVCA can best support them..

6. Cost of Membership

6.1 There will be a graded scale for membership, with groups paying a fee dependent on the annual income of the member organisation. These rates will be set out on the membership application form.

6.2 The membership rate will be reviewed annually when the budget is set.

6.3 The membership year runs from October 1st to September 30th. Groups who become members part way during the GAVCA membership year will pay a pro-rata fee for the first part-year of their membership.

7. Procedure for Applying for Membership

7.1 Membership application forms will be distributed as widely as possible to encourage as wide a membership of GAVCA as possible, including in mailings, at training and Forum events, in GAVCA offices’ Reception, and at other events where GAVCA has publicity available. The application form will also be available to download from the GAVCA Website.

7.2 All applicants will be sent an acknowledgement of receipt of their application with details of the date of the Board meeting at which it will be assessed.

7.3 Applications for membership will be assessed against the eligibility criteria.

7.4 Recommendations for membership will then taken to the next Executive Committee meeting for agreement.

7.5 Once membership has been agreed and the appropriate fee paid, the organisation will be sent a membership certificate, a welcome pack, log-in details to access the members section of the website.

7.6 If membership is refused a letter will be sent to the organisation explaining which of the criteria it does not meet.

7.7 The organisation will then be contacted by a member of staff. This is an opportunity to add to intelligence information kept by GAVCA about the status and needs of VCS groups in the county, to inform them of GAVCA's services and to discuss how they would like to engage with GAVCA.

8 Procedure for Renewals

8.1 Membership will be renewable from October 1st annually. A reminder will be sent out by GAVCA in July to give members plenty of time to pay their renewal fee before their current membership runs out, with a further reminder being sent out in October.

8.2 Every effort will be made to contact by phone any groups who have not renewed their membership by Christmas to encourage them to do so or gain feedback as to why they have decided not to renew their membership.

9 Friends' Criteria

9.1 Organisations wishing to endorse the work of GAVCA but not eligible for membership (i.e. private or statutory sector or VCOs who don't work within Gloucestershire) can be linked to GAVCA in a formal, but not constitutional or accountable way, as Friends of GAVCA.

9.2 Individuals who wish to support the work of GAVCA may become Friends of GAVCA.

8.3 Friends will be entitled to receive the regular PULSE newsletter and other regular information mailings from GAVCA.

10. Services Provided to Non-Members

9.1 All voluntary and community groups, or other organisations whose work benefits any areas of Gloucestershire, are entitled to receive services from GAVCA whether or not they are members, but will be charged according to GAVCA's Charging Policy.

Date prepared: Jan 2012

Prepared by: Sally Pickering Issue Number: 08

Date revision agreed by Executive Committee: 10 Jan 2012

Appendix : Definition of a VCO:

A VCO:

- is non statutory,
- is a not-for-profit organisation
- is set up for community or public benefit.
- is accountable to the people it serves
- could have one of a range of organisational structures including charities, companies limited by guarantee, co-operatives, or social enterprises

This definition includes:

- parent-teacher associations and other such groups which support statutory activities but are not run by the statutory body
- private and independent school Boards (academies)
- the governing committee of a faith group e.g. Parochial Church Council
- Housing Associations

This definition does not include:

- parish councils
- Local Authority school governors' boards
- children's centres

It is worth remembering that many statutory services employ significant numbers of volunteers, but the use of volunteers does not make an organisation a VCO.