



GAVCA Specimen Policy: Members Policy Development

January 2010

Background information to support your policy development

All incorporated organisations must have members – so a policy is an integral part of your constitutional arrangements. In the constitution or set of rules the role of members must be clear and differentiated from clients, supporters or participants. Members may be separate from the Board of Trustees or they may be the Board. They have voting rights.

Who should adopt the policy for the organisation?

Whoever it is in the organisation that makes up the Board or Management Committee are responsible for the adoption of this policy. The Board can delegate the writing of the policy.

Considerations for your organisation

- A register of members must be kept – members are part of the governance of the organisation and failure to keep records can cause serious legal problems. How and where will you keep this information? Do you comply with data protection?
- Who looks after the membership and what do members get out of your organisation?
- Equalities and membership. There are some grounds to restrict membership – small organisations with less than 25 members or religious or specialised organisations can determine their membership. Within any membership organisation consider the spread and cover of your membership across the equality strands – race, age, disability, gender, sexuality, transgender and faith.

Recent Changes

None

For more information about Membership issues

- At GAVCA we have *The Voluntary Sector Legal Handbook 2009* edition for detailed legal checks. You are welcome to drop in to look at this resource. Contact Gloucester 01452 332424 and Cheltenham 01242 227737
- www.charitycommission.gov.uk Publication RS7 covers everything you would need to know.
-



Gloucestershire Association for Voluntary and Community Action

Membership Policy

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 of 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 VCOs in Gloucestershire have an opportunity to be a member, whether as well as, or instead of, membership of another LIO, 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 LIO 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 have a local (within Gloucestershire) governing committee, and it is this local branch that is eligible for membership.

2.3 Where a county organisation runs several projects or services in the county, it is this “parent” county organisation that is eligible to become a member.

2.4 Membership of another LIO 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 local (ie within Gloucestershire) committee or other such method of being accountable to its 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 Equal Opportunities 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.

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 above criteria.

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 and are not therefore eligible for membership in their own right. However, they may be considered for membership if they do meet all the above criteria in their own right.

5 Benefits of Membership

5.1 Organisations which are full 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 Representatives of member organisations may 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 coalesced into a definite organisation or group. Therefore, unlike other bodies, it cannot confine its work to its members. However, full 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 As part of the process of applying for membership, all groups will receive an initial phone interview with a member of the GAVCA Community Development Team to assess their development needs.

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 their 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 Membership will be renewable from October 1st annually. A reminder will be sent out by GAVCA in July. Groups who become members during the year will pay a pro-rata fee for the first part-year.

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 Applications for membership will be assessed against the eligibility criteria. They will then be contacted by a member of the Organisational Development Team or the Chief Executive.

7.3 This interview will be an opportunity to verify the statements made on the application form and also to add to community audit information kept by GAVCA about the status and needs of VCS groups in the county. From this interview, staff will make a recommendation regarding whether to accept as a member and/or what support/work is required.

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.

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

8 Friends' Criteria

8.1 Organisations wishing to endorse the work of GAVCA but not eligible for membership can be linked to GAVCA in a formal, but not constitutional or accountable way, as Friends of GAVCA.

8.2 In particular, organisations whose area of benefit does not include Gloucestershire may become Friends of GAVCA. These organisations will also be encouraged to become members of the Local Development Agency in the area covered by their work.

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

9. Services Provided to Non-Members

9.1 All voluntary and community groups, or other organisations whose work benefits any areas of Gloucestershire, will be entitled to be included on GAVCA's mailing lists and receive regular newsletters and other information mailings, according to the criteria of funders of these services.

9.2 Any voluntary and community groups, whose area of benefit includes Gloucestershire will be entitled to other support services according to the criteria of the various funders of these services. offered by GAVCA in line with its aims and objectives.

9.3 Friends of GAVCA will also be included on the GAVCA Mailing List and receive newsletters and other information mailings.

10. Data Protection

10.1 All information relating to members and friends of the organisation must be held in accordance with the organisation's Data Protection Policy. Please refer to the Data Protection Policy for further guidelines.

Date prepared: 1 July 08

Prepared by:

Issue Number: 06

Agreed by Executive Committee: 1 July 08

Date revised: 1 Dec 09

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
- the governing committee of a faith group eg. Parochial Church Council
- Housing Associations
- social enterprises

This definition does not include:

- parish councils
- school governors' boards
- children's centres
- Sure Start 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.