

# Federation of American Aquarium Societies



## Starting an Aquarium Society

### **Congratulations!**

If you are reading this publication, you have already made the most important step in the formation of an aquarium society. At this point in time, your society may be nothing more than a dream, something which would be “nice to have” in your area, or something which has simply been spoken of by you and your fellow hobbyists in the past. After reading this material, you will have a better knowledge of what is required in the formation of an aquarium society.

Notice we have said *you*. If you do not take the first steps, you can rest assured that nothing will be accomplished. You must have a strong desire to see a society formed in your area and be willing to provide the time and effort required to get things started. You must also believe that what you are setting out to accomplish is a beneficial service to the hobby and to the hobbyists in your area.

FAAS estimates that there are between 100 and 200 aquarium societies and specialty groups operating across the country. Some consist of only a handful of members while a few have several hundred members. The average is about 75 members per society. This total membership represents a small percentage of those who keep aquariums.

Although many people get involved with aquaria sometime in their life, the average hobbyist is involved in the for less than one year. Why? The main reason has been attributed to the lack of adequate knowledge about the hobby.

An aquarium society operates to increase the involvement of people in the hobby.

Societies of long-standing existence can be proud of their records, but they too began as a simple idea and with a small group of dedicated members. Others start off on the right track, but are unable to maintain momentum. Even those who have been around for many years have been known to disintegrate through internal strife and conflict. We hope that by reading and following this publication, as a guide, that your society will flourish for many years as the official representative of the hobby in your area.

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## How FAAS Can Help You in Formation and Beyond

FAAS is chartered to support existing societies as well as those being planned or formed. We also monitor proposed governmental legislation which might affect the hobby.

FAAS communicates with member societies primarily through our website at <http://www.faas.info> and through regular emails to FAAS Delegates, the members of the local society charged with maintaining their club's correspondence with FAAS.

Membership in FAAS is *free* to any qualified aquarium (freshwater or marine) or pond society in the Americas. Clubs may join online at <http://www.faas.info>. Once you join, your club will be listed in our member database available online.

FAAS services are geared to making life easier for those who accept the responsibility of holding office in aquarium societies such as:

- *Best Practices Information* to help societies run better. Our website includes articles and downloads for this purpose
- *Programming* to use at monthly meetings is available to download
- *Awards Programs* to recognize the writers and editors of Society publications

Member societies may ask to receive a *FAAS Medallion* to be used as the society determines each year.

FAAS does not dictate local society policy, but simply offer advice. The final decisions are yours. All we can do is offer suggestions and ideas.

We wish you the very best of luck in your endeavor and hope that we will see your society as a member of FAAS in the near future.

## Introduction

It would take more than this entire booklet to cover each and every aspect of society formation in detail. For this reason what you read is best classified as general advice. A society can be formed with a large group or just a few interested people. Numbers are not particularly important at the outset. It might be preferable to form the society and get it operating in basic form with a dedicated handful of workers. The fewer people the formation group contains the easier it is to get things done. Stagnation after the initial decision to form can be dangerous and speed can be important once you begin.

## Do Your Homework

The idea to form a society may be that of only one or two individuals and they should be prepared to do the groundwork for it. Perhaps one of these hobbyists has had previous society administrative experience, or at least been involved as a member of another society. This may offer an information source for the homework phase of the operation. You might want to solicit information from as many sources as possible.

FAAS can provide you with almost anything you will need based upon the operating procedures of member clubs and the experience of those responsible for the various FAAS Committees. Other nearby societies are also good sources of information. Personal contact with other clubs is perhaps the best but be specific when asking for information. If you want a sample of a working Constitution and Bylaws, ask for it. Simply saying you wish to form a society and would like some information may not get you the desired results.

By collecting several samples of each planned activity or set of rules you will be able to determine the method to be used in your area according to what you hope to achieve. Remember that each example you see will reflect the

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activities and the needs of a totally different group in another area and just because it works for them doesn't mean it will work for you. Chances are it will, but be flexible.

Do your groundwork thoroughly and be prepared to answer questions on anything you mention before progressing to the next stage. The planning should be the longest stage of society formation and could even take several months. If at all possible try to have as much printed material available as possible in handout form when you finally decide the time is right to form your nucleus.

## Forming the Nucleus

By the time you are ready to form an operating group, the nucleus should already be established. We would suggest that a dozen hobbyists would be sufficient as a minimum to begin. At this point, you may wish to announce the intended formation on local radio stations or in the newspapers. Another way is to place posters in local pet shops if you have them in your area.

Encourage potential members to email or phone you with their intentions to attend the meeting and be sure to get their names, phone numbers and addresses when they call. Allow about a month between your initial announcement and the first meeting. Contact each prospective member just before as a reminder.

You may find there is great interest and many hobbyists who wish to become involved, but that may be unlikely at this stage. If time permits, send a notice of the meeting in the mail with an outline of what is to be covered at the first meeting. Emphasize the fact that those who attend will be getting involved from the start in the new society.

## The First Meeting

Keep the meeting informal and have coffee and refreshments on hand.

Here's what we recommend:

- Introductions  
Start off on common ground by going around the room and asking everyone to introduce themselves
- Select Temporary Officers  
Emphasize the fact that these are temporary positions and that actual elections for officers will take place at the general meeting when it is scheduled.
  - Presiding Officer  
Ask someone to act as Presiding Officer. This will likely be the person reading this document, whose idea and efforts made the first meeting a reality
  - Select a Secretary to keep the minutes of the meeting.
  - Select a name for the society  
Allow everyone to contribute to the name and use a simple show of hands to approve the name.
  - Decide on the Objectives for the Society  
Keep in mind that the selected objectives will probably remain intact for many years and they must reflect your local interests. Perhaps you have a public aquarium locally and wish to support it. Perhaps there is talk of one being built and they are seeking support. Perhaps there is a need to set up some aquariums in a local hospital. These are but a few of the items you may wish to discuss.

The next item should be to pass out the proposed Constitution and/or by-laws that should have been made during your planning stage. Also indicate the various committee positions which will be required as soon as possible. Ask that all present be ready to discuss the proposals and vote on them at the next meeting.

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The date, time and place of the next meeting should then be determined. Select the day that will allow as many as possible to attend and set it in the near future, perhaps a week later. Ask that all present bring a friend to the next meeting. This will help offset those who will not attend the second meeting.

## Meeting Number Two

A phone call should be made to all those who attended the first meeting to remind them of the second meeting. Encourage them at this time to offer ideas and suggestions as some may not wish to do so in front of all present. Also ask each one if they have considered running for an office to give you some idea of what to expect at the second meeting.

The presiding officer and secretary from the last meeting continue for this one. If either is not present another person must be selected to fill the vacancy.

Begin the meeting as before by introducing any new members. Then start with the Constitution. Cover each point one at a time and encourage discussion from all members. Be prepared to discuss each point and offer alternatives. Do not presume that what you passed out will be what they wish to see placed into effect.

Next you should begin work on the by-laws. The Constitution states who you are and what you hope to accomplish. The by-laws usually state how this will be done. By covering each item point by point you may very well find it possible to have the final approval at this meeting. The by-laws should contain specific duties of the various committees such as Program, Show, Publishing, Membership, etc. Also emphasize the fact that the committees are not expected to be at full operating capacity at the outset.

Persons who wish to run for an office should be asked to state what office they are interested in and give a brief outline of their qualifications. This will give people a chance to consider them before the elections at the next meeting.

Make sure that all present know what is expected of them and when it is expected to be done. You may not wish to set the date for the next meeting at this point as it will depend upon how fast you can organize and obtain a suitable meeting place. It should be far enough to advertise the meeting and soon enough to maintain interest.

You may wish to pass out samples of such items as Jar Show Rules, Fund Raising ideas or even an auction guideline at this meeting in order to stimulate input.

## Meeting Number Three

The same presiding officer and secretary should continue for this meeting.

Complete any unfinished business concerning the Constitution and Bylaws and then proceed on to the format of the first general meeting. This will be the election of the officers and committee chairs.

Those individuals who wish to run should be recognized and allowed to again briefly state their qualifications as each office is considered. The voting should be done separately for each office and be by secret ballot. The officers should be elected from president down and then committee chairs. Whichever candidate is elected President should then take over as presiding officer and conduct the rest of the meeting.

Once the new officers and committees have been determined the date of the first meeting of the full society should be set and a permanent location for the meeting established. The date should be far enough in advance to give the officers and chairs time to organize and plan for this vital meeting. A good idea is to allow the committee chairs and officers to have as much freedom as they require in order to get the ball rolling. They must be enthusiastic and dedicated to have become involved in the first place so do not dampen their spirits.

The only committee which may not be involved at this point may be the publishing committee, but it would be nice if you could have a newsletter printed and ready for hand out to all those who attend the general meeting. Use your

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basic knowledge to write a few articles or even copy from existing exchange magazines if you happen to have some on hand. By giving those who attend something to take home they are more likely to return. It would also be nice if membership cards were available at this first meeting but this may not be economically feasible.

By all means set up this first meeting with the idea that you are going to make money at it and not just from the membership dues that should be paid at this meeting. Perhaps a local pet shop owner could donate a prize or two as a raffle prize. Tickets could be sold at a profit. Hold an auction of hobby oriented items with a portion of the proceeds going to the society treasury. Those present at this meeting may well provide many items for auction right from the start. Donations can also be asked for to help defray the costs of the meeting.

The program committee should try to have several meetings planned that can be announced at this first meeting in order to attract those present to attend in the future. Perhaps even a Jar Show might be in order if there seems to be enough interest from those present. However, this may not be practical until later.

Be prepared to keep in close contact with all key figures right up to the final day to insure that everything is in order.

### **The First General Meeting**

By the time the meeting rolls around you should be fully prepared to handle it and any situation which arise from it. Explain to all present what the society stands for and what they can expect from it. Explain the various activities which have been planned and pass out copies of the Constitution and Bylaws to all those that have joined.

Ask for volunteers to man the various committees and ask all interested to attend the next scheduled Executive Committee meeting. Do encourage their input and their participation in any way possible. The initial planning is now over and was accomplished with the small nucleus. The task of building the society is one that will require the efforts of many hobbyists and plans to increase the membership must be put into effect.

Keep the meeting informal and keep business to a minimum. By setting this precedent, you will have made a great step forward in the future success of the society. Business has no place in the general meeting unless it involves the vote of the general membership. Keep business to the business meeting and you will keep your members a lot longer.

### **Constitution and Bylaws**

Your constitution and bylaws are important documents. The Constitution tells you what you are and what you do. The Bylaws explain in detail how you intend to accomplish this.

The Constitution should be established when the Society is newly formed and is not intended to be changed except under unique circumstances. The articles of the Constitution are the reasons for the existence of your organization and to change them is a matter of serious consideration.

Bylaws for societies which have constitutions are something else altogether. This is where changes should be more easily made and the rules more flexible. The day to day operations of the society must be able to meet changes in various governmental rules and regulations or in procedures dictated by outside agencies such as banks. By including only what is required in the Constitution, and by putting the details and explanations into the Bylaws, these changes can be made in an easier fashion.

Every member of the society should have a copy of these documents given to him when he first joins and should be provided with revisions as they are adopted. An alternative is to publish these documents on the society web site. Ideally, all members fully understand these documents so that they might better understand why things happen.

It should be society policy to review the bylaws periodically. This may be best accomplished at the change in administrators. You may wish to consider a combined meeting of both outgoing and incoming members for this purpose. You will gain the advice of those who have operated under the existing rules for at least a year as well as those who are under the rules for another year.

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Simple word changes or even complete statements can easily be accomplished by publication in the newsletter of the proposal, but major changes may require written notice to each individual member. You should attempt to obtain maximum input from all members on changes and insure that all members are informed.

## Constitution & Bylaws

FAAS offers a sample constitution and bylaws on our website at [http://www.faas.info/sample\\_constitution.html](http://www.faas.info/sample_constitution.html).

The constitution is the document which outlines what your society does and who you are. These are the items that should remain stable and consistent for years. The process of amending the constitution is normally a longer and more involved procedure as it represents the foundation of your society.

The Bylaws contain more detail on the day-to-day operation of your society.

The Bylaws contain the specific duties and responsibilities of the committees, explain election procedures, define membership classifications, and cover the day-to-day operations and so on.

Some new-forming groups feel that the help of a lawyer is required. This may be true in cases of incorporation, but should not be necessary for most groups.

## Elections

Societies sometimes have difficulty in fielding full slates of candidates for elections. This is an unfortunate occurrence, but one which may never change. It is rare to hear of a society that can boast of competition in all elected positions. Most will have competition in one or two key positions, but more often than not the majority will be filled by acclamation.

In order to make the best of a difficult situation, the outgoing administrators must do all they can to help insure that a full slate is obtained for the coming year

It may be helpful to form a Nominating Committee consisting of at least three active members. This committee should be formed at least a month prior to the actual elections. Members of the Nominating Committee should be asked to contact every society member to determine whether or not the member is willing to run for office or volunteer to fill a working position. This procedure will undoubtedly obtain a few candidates, but a better policy might be personal contact. Simply opening the elections by accepting nominations from the floor can result in little more than wasted time. The nominations from the floor should be designed to compliment the efforts of the Nominating Committee and to allow for last minute decisions on the part of the candidates.

## Voting

All elections requiring a vote should be done by secret ballot to avoid intimidation or embarrassment both to the candidates and the members. The voting can be done one position at a time starting with the President.

A count of all eligible voting members in attendance should be made before any voting takes place in order to insure no ineligible votes are cast. Members who are not involved in the elections as a candidate or their supporters should do the actual counting of ballots. The actual number of votes cast for each candidate may be announced but it is not required.

## Rules

Those members who are charged with making the rules and regulations within a society have an important responsibility to the membership. They must insure that they are unbiased, unselfish, and that they are thinking only of the welfare of the society (general membership) when engaged in "law making".

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It is doubtful that a perfect set of rules will ever be found for any society, a fact that is more than apparent when reading over the various show rules and other administrative documents issued by the various societies. Rules are made to be changed, and are usually changed according to the wishes and desires of the present administration. These changes are caused by problems that have occurred in the past and are put into effect in order to try and overcome them.

The trouble with changing rules is that the changes themselves often create a new set of totally different problems and the cycle starts over again.

Try to keep it simple. Address the concerns you have but do not try and cover every contingency. Give your officers and chairmen room to negotiate and to be flexible as needed. Address the problem in terms of why is it a problem. Is it just one or two individuals or is it a larger group which has an issue with the current rule? If just one or two, then address a solution to them; do not penalize the many for the attitudes of a few.

Unwritten rules can cause a great deal of internal conflict in any society, the repercussions of which are sometimes irreversible. It should be the responsibility of every administrative group to insure that each and every member knows exactly where he stands in regards to rules and regulations governing the society and its activities. The exclusion of "unwritten rules" will do much to insure that this happens.

In order to operate effective competitions, programs and projects within a society, a set of rules must be created for each. These rules change as a society matures until a workable combination can be obtained.

It is the responsibility of the administrative group to approve any rules and regulations governing the activities of the society. Final approval should come about in the form of acceptance, by majority vote, of the administrators. By allowing any interested member to attend business meetings you will allow them to add ideas and input which could very well add to the overall effectiveness of the project involved. This procedure will also avoid long drawn out confrontations at the general meetings, where only a small percentage of those attending will be interested.

No matter what competition, program or project you are dealing with, it is possible to lay it out in an orderly, complete and easily understood format, one which members learn to recognize and understand. The following example can be modified to suit your individual society requirements but some form of standardization is beneficial.

### *Competition (Program/Project)*

Description of what's to take place and who may participate. Include a break down of categories if there are any, such as Annual / Continuing / Fish / Plant

### *Rules*

This may require several subsections but they should be complete. In the case of an annual show they may include general rules, entry rules, tank rules, judging rules, or any combination of them. By breaking the rules down into these different categories they are more easily understood.

### *Duties*

List the duties of the concerned committee, chairman and also of any subcommittee which may be involved. This may simply involve reference to the bylaws but may require further details.

### *Classes/Categories*

Listed complete with restrictions or descriptions.

### *Awards*

Listed complete with descriptions, eligibility, and any restrictions. Be sure to include any special awards and requirements for them.

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## *Judging*

This would include judging criteria for each different class, requirements for progression to different levels or simply point systems for the event in question. In order that all participants stand an equal opportunity in these events it is important that they all be made aware of these factors.

## *Reference Material*

Just as judging criteria is important to know for participants in competitions, it is also important to know what publications or other methods will be used as a reference by those responsible for determining winners or advancement.

Once a set of rules has been established it should be adhered to for the entire duration of the event in question. Ongoing programs may well require alteration, but it should never be to the disadvantage of the participant. In some cases it will be found that the rules, no matter how complete, do not cover a given situation.

If time permits, the administrative group should decide upon the policy. If time is limited, as is often the case at a large scale show, the chairman should be provided with authority to make decisions. His decision should be accepted as being final on the situation in that instance.

Rules are a means of protection. They protect the interests of the participant as well as those of the society. They ensure that all concerned are subjected to the same restrictions as well as the same benefits. There will seldom be found a set of rules that are suitable to all societies, as each group will have special and unique requirements for different events. However, the common factor should be the establishment of easy to understand guidelines. A fair and effective set of rules will help a great deal in the success of any competition, program or project.

## **SOCIETY MEETINGS**

### **General Meeting**

The general meeting is the heart of all societies. The members are provided with a gathering place where they can meet and chat with friends who share a common interest as well as to exchange ideas and to learn from the programs. It is also the opportunity for the administrators to communicate directly with the members.

A small society, or one that is newly formed, may find they can easily accommodate all members in private homes for meetings. As the size of the membership increases, consideration must be made for more suitable facilities. It is most important that careful planning goes into the move of any society meeting place as the outcome of a poorly planned move may have long lasting effects on the success of the society. Some points to consider are:

Be located in a central location, easily reached by most members, on a regular bus route that operates when the meeting is to be held.

- Adequate parking and seating capacity for present and anticipated numbers.
- Electrical and water outlets, kitchen facilities, storage areas and tables or benches.
- Availability of the site. Can you book a regular schedule well in advance?

To accommodate the needs of the majority of your members, circulate a questionnaire. You will not be able to please everyone. Decide upon a date and time and then stick to it. Remember that whenever you change a general meeting date or time, you will lose some members due to other commitments, but you may gain a few as well.

Consider weekend days vs. weekend evenings and plan on a 2-2 ½ hour meeting. Some members have children of school age. Often members drift away from the hobby and the society during long breaks.

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Society administrators have long been aware that poor meetings, especially poor programs, are one of the major reasons for transient memberships as well as floundering societies.

The effective administrator will make himself aware of the danger areas and will do all he possibly can to avoid them within his group. By keeping business within the business meeting you have made the first step towards success. Communicate with the members through the minutes and messages in the society publication as well as by current announcements and reminders at the general meeting.

Some members may have a desire to know what is going on in more detail and in order to satisfy their needs the business meetings must be open to all interested members. The failure to open the business meeting will almost assure that business will get dragged into the general meeting by the interested member, who most certainly has a right to know what is going on.

By establishing a suitable format for the general meeting and then sticking to it as much as possible, the members will learn what to expect. It may not be easy to accomplish this and yet maintain the informal atmosphere that is desirable at these meetings but it should be attempted. In the instance where a speaker has used up his allotted time and yet the interest of the members is maintained, then you must be flexible enough to accommodate them. This will be a rare occurrence for most societies, but should not present too great a problem.

Know your member's interests and attempt to provide them all with something at as many meetings as possible. You won't keep a marine enthusiast as a member too long unless you include marine topics from time to time and the same applies to all members with specialty interests. With careful planning around the needs of those with special interests, it's possible to provide for the needs of the average hobbyist.

Groups based in larger cities will obviously have a wider range of resources at their disposal than those in smaller areas. Yet population and size of an operating area will not always determine the size of the membership or the number of members willing to provide program material.

## **Program Presentation**

A successful presentation results in your members obtaining a maximum of information. Very often distractions can hinder an otherwise interesting presentation.

A distraction, such as talking among the members, is the most common problem. Why are they talking? Possibly they cannot hear, or they are not interested or they are distracted by some other event. It is best to remove all distractions and to insure that only the presentation is taking place. Keep other events to the rear of the room.

Make sure that the room is not too hot or too cold; keep them comfortable. Keep unnecessary equipment out of sight until it is required and most importantly, attempt to remain as informal as possible throughout.

## **Program Methods and Hints**

Most societies elect a program chairman who is responsible for providing the membership with interesting, varied, hobby oriented material at the general meeting. This person should be selected with great care as his actions will have a decided effect on the success or failure of your society. Other societies run this position as a combined administrative group effort.

The content of program should be varied to meet the interests of as many members as possible. Perhaps a questionnaire completed at one of the general meetings will help to determine what the members want to see and hear in the coming months. By knowing the special interests of your members, you will be able to provide for them. It is extremely difficult to keep coming up with new and original ideas, especially in smaller locations. However, in order to attract and retain members it must be done.

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The temptation to repeat a program should be avoided whenever possible. A time lapse of two years is usually acceptable for repetitions of more popular or interesting subjects. A look at your membership lists will reveal that almost a complete turnover in members has occurred during that time and only the hard core members remain.

A point that is sometimes overlooked by administrators is to get live fish to the meeting. This is often done in the form of monthly competitions or auctions, but often overlooked in the presentation in favor of slides or films. There is no substitute for the real thing.

Not only should the subject matter of a program be varied, but also the method of presentation. It is all too easy to establish a trend where slide/tape presentations are offered very month. This can become quite tedious as well as costly.

Other methods you might consider include Speaker, Speaker Demonstrations, Speaker and Slides, Film, Group Seminars, Panel Discussions, Open Discussions, Short Topic Presentations.

Variety undoubtedly helps to maintain interest. Vary the subject matter, the methods, and the person responsible for the presentations. Use your imagination and examine all possible sources for potential material. The efforts spent in this area of administration will be well rewarded by increased interest in the society as well as by an increased membership.

## **Sources for Programs**

The Speaker Chairman is the person who is primarily responsible for obtaining speakers and programs. A budget should be established for programs to cover expenses such as speaker travel or per diem reimbursement.

Quality programs require quality speakers. Here are a few sources of speakers:

### *High Schools, Colleges, Universities*

Consider using biology teachers. Each of these has a specialty area and quite often they may be interested in participating. All aspects of the hobby from fish, plants, genetics, diseases or foods may be found as the specialty of these people.

### *Local Water Departments*

Water chemistry, especially local water quality, is not the most widely discussed subject but could be very revealing as well as interesting. The information will be from a professional and be current. Along the same lines is the Local Health Department, which may have a specialist in water borne diseases to humans as well as to fishes.

### *Local Members*

Not all of us are willing to stand in front of a meeting and present a 30-40 minute program, but each and every member of a society has something to offer. The willing speaker is a really scarce commodity and deserves the support of all members in his presentation. He should not, however, be overtaxed. Once or twice a year is certainly sufficient and any more would be too much. The more shy members might be coaxed into sitting in on a panel discussion or to lead a group in a seminar presentation. By getting to know your member interests you will discover possible program sources. Do not push a member too hard when attempting to enlist his assistance as he may just be too shy or self conscious to do it and would rather leave the society instead. Some of the more timid members may become your star authors for the society publication if approached.

### *Other Societies*

Perhaps you are in an area where there are two or more societies. If this is the case, possibly an exchange of speakers and programs can be arranged. Do not expect to get something for nothing. A fair exchange is to the benefit of all concerned as no person or group likes being taken advantage of by another.

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## *Do It Yourself*

Almost every society either takes slides or shows or has a member who does so for his own benefit. If a slide library is set up and added to each time the opportunity arises, the pictures obtained can be built into an almost limitless set of programs. Remember that no two persons will come up with the same narration on any given set of slides. Select from a large number of slides and a few willing members and you are all set to put together a slide presentation. These can even be narrated on tape or typewritten script and offered for exchange or rent to other societies.

## *State and Federal Fish Departments*

Both employ biologists who are engaged in experiments with native species, some of whom may very well be hobbyists with a scientific background. Even if they are not, there is a wide selection of subjects they could present; fish behavior, feeding, foods, breeding or even diseases. Many governmental agencies enlist the services of University biologists in their research.

## *State and Federal Water Investigations and Environment Departments*

Groups that employ biologists are sometimes involved in different fields than those mentioned above. These people are more concerned with introductions of foreign, sometimes harmful, organisms into local waters in the form of plants and fishes as well as invertebrates. With the current emphasis placed upon these foreign introductions, you can be certain that their work will appeal to most of your members.

## *Local Museums, Conservatories and Aquariums*

These professional people are involved in collecting and classifying species which may relate to your society members interests. Many public aquariums engage in collecting trips for live specimens that may be potential program material. All will employ at least one biologist who may be willing to attend a meeting. In some cases these establishments will have film or slide presentations already available that they may be willing to loan to you.

## *Fish Farms, Wholesalers, and Dealers*

All of the people connected with these areas of the hobby are professionals. Most were hobbyists and are directly involved and dependent upon the hobby. Fish farms would be very well suited to talks on breeding, diseases and feeding. Wholesalers and dealers might be best used in presenting equipment comparisons as well as their personal experiences, many of which might involve collecting trips. Their experiences as hobbyists also might be found informative.

## *Local Pharmacist/Chemistry Teachers*

These professionals deal with drugs and prescriptions all of their lives. If they are interested in the hobby they might be persuaded to provide a presentation on easily available and economical cures. Additional material on shelf life as well as possible substitutes would also be educational.

## *Local Diving and Scuba Clubs*

Many of the members are avid photographers and may very well be the source of interesting program material on local aquatic life.

This is in no way a complete list of sources for free program material, but it is a start. Its potential is limited only by your imagination.

## **General Meeting Support Aids**

The importance of interesting and informative program material cannot be overstressed. There are, however, other ways which administrators can use to increase interest and improve the quality of the meetings. Many of these ideas are time tested and are used by many societies but others may not be quite so common and you may wish to experiment with them.

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## *Door Prizes*

Everyone likes to get something for nothing and in many cases this event alone can be the reason members attend meetings. There are several methods of dealing with door prizes; free draws where each member is given a single ticket. Door prizes can be used as a method of fund raising should there be a need for this. Administrators should attempt to take advantage of the human weakness of getting something for nothing if at all possible. Try to arrange for one prize for every 5-10 members present and include guests and visitors. This could easily mean new members to the society. Some groups use a single door prize of substantial value as opposed to several smaller items and this can work as well.

## *Raffles*

While this subject may be more directly related to fund raising, it also enters into the subject at hand. A raffle can increase funds while at the same time increasing interest. The prize should be substantial, or possibly several smaller items and the cost should be set low enough to appeal to all members. It is entirely possible to recover your rent and program costs from this event.

## *Auctions*

The benefits of holding regular auctions are many and every society should consider holding them according to their needs and degree of interest displayed in them.

## *Monthly Fish Competition*

This common event is one of the most versatile of all support aids, but the main benefit to be obtained from it is that it brings fish to the fish meeting.

## *Quiz*

This can take the form of a series of questions prepared by a different member each month. It can be based upon the Fish of the Month Competition Class or something altogether different. The quiz should be in handout form with pencils provided and should be multiple choice or simple answer in order to avoid long delays. The sheets should be exchanged and marked and the winner(s) rewarded with either free tickets on the door prizes or with a small prize of hobby goods. This practice will encourage members to read up on a given topic, provided the topic is advertised, and will encourage members to become involved. It is also educational. A variation on this theme might be guessing the identity of fishes from slices or even from verbal descriptions.

## *Early Bird Drawing*

The Early Bird Drawing is simply a modification on the door prize. But drawn immediately at the time the meeting starts to encourage members to arrive on time. It is not very effective if the meetings don't start as announced.

## *BAP*

In order to stimulate interest in the Breeder's Award Program, ease the work load of the BAP Chairman and Committee and to get fish to the meeting, the parents and fry could be brought to the meeting. Even if the participant is reluctant to speak of his success to the membership as a whole he might do so on a one to one basis.

## *Guess the Number of Fry*

This would not be a monthly event but it can be worked in from time to time. Any member who happens to be willing to part with a large spawning of fry would be needed. The members purchase tickets for their guess that is recorded. The closest guess would receive a prize, possibly the parents or a pair of the same species. The fry can then be distributed free of charge. This is dependent upon a generous member but is not impossible to accomplish.

## *Fish Raising Contest*

There are several variations on this theme that can be used to attract interest. The society should purchase sufficient pairs of young fish of approximately the same size and certainly the same species. They are sold to the members at a break and then, after a predetermined period of time, the participants return to the meeting with their specimens.

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They are judged in a manner similar to the fish competition and a winner determined. The prize(s) can be as simple as small ribbons or as costly as a trophy.

By using various classes on a continuing basis the interest can be maintained. New fish species can also be introduced to the area and it will also bring fish to the meeting.

### *Swap Table*

This idea can have fund raising as its objective or simply as an interest getter. Members bring their excess hobby items and trade or sell them among themselves during the meeting break. A straight fee can be charged to participants if desired.

### *Silent Auction*

A silent auction variation on the regular auction. Members register their items and place them on display for a limited time. The organizers provide slips of paper so members can write their names on them along with their bids and place them into a small bowl in front of the items to be sold. The items are sold to the highest bidder.

### *Multi Raffle*

Members purchase tickets to be placed into a bowl in front of any number of better quality fish (possibly in pairs to promote the BAP) or hobby equipment. There is no limit on the number of tickets any member may place in front of an item and the winners are determined by a draw. By keeping the price of tickets low enough to allow all to participate this can be quite profitable as well as interesting. It is mandatory, though, to use only attractive items in this event.

## **Auctions**

These events provide the members with a medium whereby they are able to dispose of excess fish, plants, and equipment at a profit. Auctions also increases interest within a society and serve as a source of revenue.

Auctions will be far more successful if you give the members a fair return for their sales, and if you acquire an auctioneer who knows his products and who also has a sense of humor. The last quality keeps the auction entertaining.

Auction frequency varies greatly among societies, ranging from a regular monthly auction at each general meeting to only one “giant” or “super” auction per year. The frequency will depend upon local need and participation. Some societies use the 50/50 split on sales while others use 10/90 in favor of the seller. You will need to find a split that is suited to your group. By assuring a fair return you may find that the participants are not always the dedicated few and the quality of items auctioned will be guaranteed.

There are many variations on the basic auction that can be utilized to the benefit of any society. You need not limit auctions to the general meetings either. Advertise them as a major fund raising event and invite the public.

You must insure that you will have enough items to make this sort of venture worth while. Many groups hold auctions at major events such as shows. State the terms of the auction in all entry forms so that the entrant will be fully aware of what he can expect. If a profit is to be returned then you might also include a deadline for this so that participants from other locations can rely on relatively speedy action.

It helps to put attractive items up for auction and these can be in the form of donations similar to those acquired for door prizes or raffles. You may also wish to investigate auctioning non-hobby items of general appeal, especially in the case of holding a fund raising event.

Control of the auction is important. State the rules clearly to all concerned— such as registration time, marking of items, bagging procedures, method of payment, collection of items bought, minimum bids accepted, and procedures for handling reserved bids. Involve as many people in the auction as possible rather than let one or two do all the

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work. This is a great opportunity to employ your younger members productively giving them a sense of being needed. Finally, should you need to limit the auction, do so by the number of items brought, not by time.

### **Raffles**

Almost all organizations similar to ours hold raffles in order to raise funds to carry out their activities and support their organizations. Aquarium society administrators are limited only by their imagination when it comes to planning raffles. Publication exchanges with other societies will reveal many hints and ideas to draw upon.

A successful raffle must be carefully planned. It must be held on a defined level and advertising should be conducted accordingly. The prize(s) offered must be of interest to the majority of those to whom you expect to sell tickets. A monthly raffle of a power filter would not attract sales to the general public but a weekend trip for two to a resort would. The latter would be a better prize for raffles where tickets are sold to the public.

Some state and local governments require that all raffles where tickets are sold to the public be licensed. It would be wise to check the legal implications of this before starting, thus avoiding possible embarrassment to your society. In most cases the license fee is minimal and only requires a number on each ticket plus an accounting of funds afterwards. It may also involve a required donation to a charitable organization of a percentage of the profit.

Many societies conduct ongoing raffles that involve the sale of tickets to the public by members. Generally, raffles require at least three months in order to make them worthwhile, as you will not get 100% member participation in selling. Offer some form of reward to sellers to increase their desire to sell, such as free tickets or a prize for the seller with the winning ticket. Establishing a prize for the one selling the most tickets will usually not help, as your best seller will do so continually.

By obtaining support in the form of donations, even in part, your profits are increased. Printing your own tickets also helps increase your profit. But in any event, do not overprice the tickets and remember that once a single ticket is sold you are committed. Plan all raffles carefully.

### *Obtaining Door and Raffle Prizes*

Do not be content to rely solely upon the generosity of local dealers for needed items for at best this will do little more than cause a break down in the dealer society relationship.

Within reason, you can consider sympathetic dealers as a possible donation source, but don't overtax their generosity. Membership to FAAS will provide you with a list of manufacturers who are known to donate merchandise to societies. Other names and addresses are to be found in trade magazines, hobby publications, and society exchanges and even on labels of products found on the shelves of your dealers.

Obtaining free donations should be handled as an organized committee effort, preferably once per year, with a mini campaign at the Annual Show or major society activity. A list of all possible donators should be compiled and a form letter drafted. This form letter should be copied on society letterhead paper if available. Consideration should be given for designing one if not available. Be sure to include in the letter the following information:

### *Society name*

A brief run down on society activities and any major events

### *Anticipated use of items you expect to receive and method of acknowledgment*

The names and private addresses of two members willing to accept any donations: Some manufacturers prefer to ship to a private address as opposed to a P.O. Box Number. It also helps to insure that their donations are being used as intended.

You should offer to send the donators a copy of your publication acknowledging receipt and the one stating disposal of his products if at all possible. In fact, a courtesy subscription to your publication will go a long way to help assure

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continued donations. At the bare minimum, a letter of appreciation should be send as soon as possible after receipt of any donations. Accurate records are a necessity for receipt/thank-you letters.

Do not expect 100% response to your requests. The donation of merchandise will depend a great deal on the availability of the product in your area. Also previous experience with your group, the manufacturer's budget and his business practices will be factors.

The donor expects little in return for his generosity other than the limited advertising you can offer by way of acknowledgments in society publications or distribution of any advertising sent with the product. This advertising should be included in the publication if that is your policy. Some manufacturers will, however, accept your distributing it at meetings or at shows in the event that you do not publish. Be sure to include your method of distribution in your letter of appreciation.

Most manufacturers will send an assortment of their lower priced goods. These make ideal door prizes. Some will also sell one or two larger items that are more suitable for raffle prizes. Others will send only one major item. This is where the yearly campaign comes in handy. By insuring that you obtain sufficient merchandise at the start of the society year, you can easily plan for its use in an effective manner.

One major raffle per meeting is all that should be anticipated as any more would overtax the member's willingness to participate. Other major items can easily be auctioned or used as prizes for other areas of involvement such as shows, membership drives, article writing contests, etc.

It may happen that some manufacturers will only donate to societies at shows. If this is the case, the keeping of an accurate and up-to-date file on each donor will be vital. If they do offer to support you in this manner, by all means take advantage of it. Always allow sufficient time for them to react to your request with reminders in the form of a letter send a couple of months prior to the show. The keeping of records in this activity is important. By fulfilling the moral obligations to your donors you will be more likely to receive donations in the future.

Local dealers can also be counted upon to support the society in this manner, but great care must be exercised in using them. Try to involve the dealers in major society functions such as annual shows rather than in the monthly meetings. They may very well provide you with a gift donation of substantial value if approached less frequently.

Other local business firms are also sources of donations that may greatly benefit the society in major events. The donations need not be hobby oriented to be put to beneficial use and the possibility should be explored in obtaining support from other than hobby dealers. Perhaps these prizes could be used at a major raffle or at a social event.

It is not easy to find a willing member to canvas local businesses in this undertaking but it could be split between several members in order to obtain the desired coverage.

Regardless of the fact that we are all non profit organizations, we all need the support of manufacturers and dealers alike. Tact and integrity will go a long way to insure that this support is continued.

### **AQUARIUM SOCIETY FORMATION HINTS & TIPS**

Decide early whether or not you intend to use a Board of Directors plus an Executive Committee, or simply an Executive Committee with additional Committee Chairmen. Often this can be a major point of contention, especially in later years where a BOD becomes the dictating power to the working executive and committee chairpersons. You must plan to involve as many members in working positions as possible.

Along with this goes the distribution of the workload. You may anticipate the fact that some willing workers are going to be able to provide more than others. Accept what you can get and be thankful. By distributing the total workload over a large group, with everyone sharing equally, you will find you will accomplish more than having a select few doing all the work.

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Avoid non-involved (no specific duties) positions such as the Vice President, Second Vice President, Past President, etc. Many clubs continue to operate with these positions carrying very little actual work responsibility and they become prestige positions. Allocate specific duties for each that is in keeping with the office.

Be bold in your actions but only after considerable logic and reasoning has been applied to each point.

Do not overtax any single individual unless absolutely certain the work will be accomplished as it should be. Many times a keen individual will accept too much responsibility and when swamped with work will quit in mid stream leaving the society high and dry. Careful management of your workers will help to avoid this.

Utilize all of your available resources. Perhaps a new member is a graphic designer by trade, perhaps one a printer or another may work with figures. Assess each person's talent and put them in the right position to help your club.

Always, always think, "What is the best for the society", not what is best for you, the current membership or the situation.

If there is another active aquarium society within close proximity establish a firm and friendly working relationship right from the start. Failure to do so will do nothing more than create hard feelings and these will be hard to forget. Do not compete, work together.

Join associations. There are many regional councils in North America, perhaps one may be near you. By all means do become members of that council as well. FAAS does not compete with Regional Councils. We are both support groups assisting local clubs in our own way and augment each other. You will benefit from any such association.

Members only join clubs for what they can get out of it. Initially this may be simply seeking information, their interest may grow and soon they are members of the society. For the most part the membership will remain only as long as they feel they are getting their money's worth. What you offer must be substantial from their point of view. A publication should be a top priority after formation. Competitions and other activities, many of which are easily organized and economical should be introduced. Make sure they know what you are doing for them.

Make plans and then stick to them. Constant changes will simply destroy the member's faith in the administration.

Take as long as necessary during the formation and planning period and then be ready to go all out once meetings are started. Make it very obvious that you are organized and that you know what you are doing. Only adequate preparation can assure success in this.

Make your new members feel they are an active part of the formation. Be personable. Make frequent phone calls. Solicit ideas and suggestions. Thank members for their help frequently. You may very well provide all the basic formation materials and information but the members must feel they are important in the overall plan. Be ready to accept the fact that others may be able to offer ideas and suggestions which may not fit in your own. Be willing to accept them.

Get to know your members. Gear the meetings and programs to their needs.

Congratulate members frequently on a one-to-one basis as well as publicly at meetings. Make sure they are aware that their efforts are appreciated. This applies throughout your involvement with the society. Remember the look on the face of a new member when they come up before the membership and is congratulated by the President. Frequent requests for applause in thanks for the efforts of an individual mean a great deal.

### **Constitution & By-law Tips**

You will undoubtedly have your own ideas as to what should and what should not be included as well as how much detail should be put in under each specific heading. We suggest that it be kept as simple as possible.

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If you feel a bit uneasy at starting to write these two documents then perhaps a new member has some legal knowledge or maybe a new member knows a lawyer who may be able to help out. Remember that you must ensure the readability for all members in the finished products.

FAAS offers a sample constitution and bylaws on our website:

[http://www.faas.info/sample\\_constitution.html](http://www.faas.info/sample_constitution.html)

Once accepted, waste no time in getting copies of all documents to all members. They should be your first official publication. The membership has to know how their organization is being run, how they are being governed and any rules or regulations they may be expected to adhere to. Print enough copies to provide one for each new member for the coming year. Anticipate that you'll require changes after the first year and that a new set will probably be required.

When listing standing committees, it is desirable to insert their job descriptions but not in too much detail. Make broad statements.

Where possible, society members should be allowed to vote on any changes to the Constitution and by-laws. You will seldom receive 100% approval for any item. Expect this. However, if handled openly and in a democratic manner, any reasonable change can be put into effect.

Once the society Constitution and by-laws have been accepted it becomes the responsibility of the administrative group to govern their society according to these documents. In order to do so it becomes imperative that at least one member of the administrative group becomes fully familiar with them. This person could act as an advisor or have the responsibility for a Review Committee. Accurate interpretation is a must.

Society activities and competitions shouldn't be included in either of these documents. To do so simply places an additional burden upon the responsible chairmen who will have to operate according to the official guidelines. Leaving them out allows for flexibility on the part of those responsible to incorporate changes and beneficial additions/deletions with relative ease.

## **TIPS ABOUT MEETINGS**

Always start your meetings at the scheduled time. If someone arrives late you may have to conduct a brief review (administration type meetings) but rather than delay the start. Nothing gives members the feeling of disorganization faster than late starts at meetings.

Act as the chairman rather than a dictator. Take each person around the room (administration meetings) one at a time and ask for comments. Soon, members will realize they will have an opportunity to speak and will wait their turn. This will help avoid the dominant members from ruling the conversation and may avoid arguments between members. After reasonable discussion end the conversation by recapping major points and call for a vote to finalize each issue.

We all realize that a format must always be a part of any meeting and you will undoubtedly form yours as time goes by. Find a method that feels comfortable and stick to it. The members will soon recognize this format and will feel comfortable with it as well.

Keep business at the business meeting. By all means allow all members access to the business meeting and encourage their participation but keep it to an absolute minimum at the General Meeting. Announcements, items of great importance under discussion, or in planning and items requiring membership approval should be all they require.

Always welcome members to any meeting and thank them for coming before the meeting is over. Never end a meeting before deciding or announcing the date, time and place for the next meeting. If the business meeting is held at a member's home make a special point of thanking that member and family for their hospitality.

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Plan your meetings in advance. An agenda is a good item to develop and use. Make short notes for all announcements and any items of business you may have to cover. Allow sufficient time to cover all items of an urgent nature and spend any remaining time on those less important. Set priorities. Do not allow the meeting to carry on to the wee hours by spending too much time on minor points which are easily left to another meeting. Remember, many in attendance will have to work the next day and may be paying a baby sitter. Consider the volunteers if you want them to come again.

Be prepared for the unexpected. A late speaker or one which never does arrive, a defective slide/tape program, etc. Backup material is important. Remember that the general meetings are only twelve per year and use the available time effectively. Likewise, if a certain aspect of the meeting is not over when it should be, be flexible enough to accommodate this fact, e.g. late completion of Bowl Show judging.

Ensure that all present know what is happening. A brief rundown of activities during the meeting will assist new members. At business meetings an agenda can be a great help.

Never end a meeting, especially a business meeting, without making certain that all present are fully aware of what they are expected to have completed before the next meeting.

### **TIPS ABOUT COMPETITIONS AND OTHER ACTIVITIES**

Establish a set of guidelines that appear to be workable according to the needs of the society at that particular point in time. Be prepared to change them after being tested for a reasonable time period but give them an honest attempt.

Do not assume that any activity is a failure simply because you get only a few participants. Give it time. Allow members to become accustomed to new ideas. Keep mentioning your activities and promote them to the membership at every opportunity. If a few members gain something from an activity it should be considered a success.

Make every attempt to make competitions valid. By this we mean that this must afford every member an equal opportunity to participate with an equal chance of winning an award. The creation of classes is invaluable here. Try to remember that those with large setups may have an unfair advantage over those who do not. Experience levels in the hobby also can be a factor, as can the age of the member.

Allow your individual chairmen to make decisions within their own respective areas of concern. Show chairmen should be allowed a certain amount of room to operate and so should your other chairman. You may decide that all rules of every area of operation should require executive and membership approval, only executive approval or you may leave all changes up to the committee. Trust your chairmen until they cause you to lose this trust. Most will be sincere and effective in their efforts for the society

Make awards as often as possible but not to the point where their prestige value is lost. Simple certificates can be prepared at minimal cost and mean a great deal. Shows may require more costly awards but keep within your budget. Awards need not be costly to be appreciated. A lot will depend on how they are presented. Take a few seconds to introduce an awards winner to let all present know why the award was earned. This will help in obtaining participation. Whenever possible attempt to award a junior and senior award based upon individual member's ages.

Carefully explain all competitions and activities to all members. Publish rules and regulations far enough in advance and ensure they are distributed in time for all members to be able to participate. If even one member is left out, it is too many. Once rules are accepted and published they should be adhered to at all costs unless all members are made aware of a change in them. These changes should be done in an official manner. Make it well known that reviews will be conducted as needed.

Use your publication as the main promoting medium of all society activities. Acknowledge successes and achievements every month. Keep the activities in the picture through constant exposure.

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Use your activities and competitions to GET FISH TO THE FISH MEETING!

Make an honest attempt in your creation of activities to offer something of value for all members. Do not assume that they all enjoy shows or that they are all avid breeders, because they are not.

## AQUARIUM SOCIETY FORMATION CHECKLIST

### Planning Stage

- Contact FAAS for additional support and list of active clubs in your area.
- Contact nearby clubs for sample rules and guidelines.
- Make contacts in your local area:
  - Possible members
  - Possible meeting places
  - Possible supporters
  - Local pet shops and hobby outlets
  - Local sources of ribbon awards
  - Local sources of publishing materials
  - Possible sources for loan of publishing equipment
  - Advertising mediums
  - TV
  - Radio stations
  - Newspapers
- Formulate a plan of attack
  - Draft a sample constitution and bylaws
  - Draft bowl show rules
  - Draft committee structure
  - Draw up a workable time schedule of formation
- Prepare your publicity (letters, posters, press releases)
- Join FAAS

### Formation Stage

- Hold your first organizational meeting
- Elect interim chairman and secretary
- Select a name for your society
- Introduce constitution and bylaws
- Keep members interested by frequent contact and reminders
- Actively solicit support from pet shops and hobby outlets

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- Confirm a site for the general meeting
- Continue formation meetings as required
- Plan for general meeting date, place, time and schedule of activities
- Introduce bowl show and/or other activity guidelines
- Plan additional meetings in advance.
- Decide on a meeting format and schedule
- Set goals, desirable to urgent and from immediate to long-range with emphasis on easy to difficult
- Renew publicity campaign for this first meeting

### *Your First General Meeting*

- Constitution and bylaws for approval.
- Nominations for office with elections at the second meeting
- Fully brief all those present as to schedule of events, plans and expectations; solicit actively for memberships
- Distribute free door prizes to encourage future attendance at meetings
- Encourage support in bowl show and introduce the planned auctions, etc., as part of all future meetings
- Keep the meeting interesting and play down business
- Request all present to attend planning meetings/business meetings to add input for formation phase
- Encourage maximum membership involvement in all areas

### *Follow up to Meeting*

- Carefully assess what has happened, what has been accomplished, possible changes and introductions for future meetings and activities.
- Determine the degree of interest expressed by the attendees and place emphasis on the areas of greatest interest.
- Develop plans and activities quickly if it is seen that the activity in question might be well accepted. Proceed with caution where less interest has been displayed.
- Organize a newsletter to all members (even a single page which announces the next meeting will suffice). Increase this as you obtain additional funds and interest.
- Maintain interest with new ideas and by actively soliciting membership participation.
- Keep in touch with FAAS as things develop and as problems are seen to develop.

## Conclusion

It would be most foolish of anyone to say they had produced a foolproof method of forming and operating an aquarium society and that is not the purpose of this publication. The purpose is to provide the reader with some insight into what is required.

You will see that the suggested methods will require modification in order to suit your own needs and circumstances. Please accept this. There are so many variables that must be considered in society formation that simply cannot be covered here. What you have read is simply a guide. Use it if you will and if you do, please let us know how it works.

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It would also be appreciated if those who have used this free Information Book would compile notes as they progress through their formation phases and when all has been done, submit a report of the adventure to the FAAS REPORT editor or to any BOD member. By doing this we may be able to add to the material found in this publication which will serve to assist those who follow.

Good Luck!

Constitution and by-laws

Incorporation Notes

Taxes and Banking

## Incorporation

A few comments are necessary to begin this section.

First, if you are thinking of incorporating at this time, or you believe you might consider it later, it is advisable to contact your Secretary of State's office and obtain the guidelines for incorporation as a Not-for-Profit organization. Each state will have varying requirements as to the nature and content of the governing documents and it is easier to comply at this stage rather than try to amend things later on.

You will find that even if you never incorporate the requirements have no adverse affect and if you do you are set up to go.

Next, much is said about tax-exempt status but little is mentioned about what it means. Tax-exempt status is a Federal status that exempts you from paying Federal Income Tax and certain other types of state and local taxes. It also allows people or companies who donate to your society to declare a deduction for the donation.

Do not bother with this procedure. The fact that you don't really qualify is the key point, but the paperwork, accounting and filing procedures required by the Federal and State governments should also discourage you. Unless you are prepared to hire a professional accounting firm and an attorney who handles such groups avoid this status.

Last, the term Not-for-Profit is confusing to people. Just understand that it does not mean that you cannot make money, just that making profits cannot be your reason for existing. Big companies exist to make money for their stockholders/owners, Not-for-Profits exist to use the money they make to further the various reasons they were created for – education, entertainment, public displays, etc.

## Taxes and Banking

You will need to contact the IRS and obtain what is called an EIN - Employers Identification Number. You need to do this whether you incorporate or not. Regardless of status every society will have to file at least an initial Federal Tax Return and probably yearly state returns. Since you do not have a Social Security Number to file under you must have the EIN to properly file the return. There is no charge involved and the forms can be obtained from the IRS.

You will also need to have the EIN to open the bank accounts. Banks are required to have either the EIN or Social Security Number for all accounts. Do not allow an individual to open the account under their personal information and SSN! Like it or not, if they open the account, even though it is your money, once it makes it to the account it belongs to them. If something were to happen to them (perhaps a fatal accident or illness) the bank would freeze the account and legally release it only to the assigned heir(s) and/or executor of the estate. They would not release it to the society nor would the heirs have to give it back.

Additionally, you have no rights to access the account, examine its records, receive statements, or in any other fashion exercise any control over the account or the money in it.

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Bank accounts should only be opened in the name of and with the EIN of the society. Most banks will require you to provide them with the names of your officers/directors and to sign documents stating that the proper resolutions were passed by your governing board authorizing the account to be opened and who is to have access to it. Banks have these preprinted and will give them to you in the process of establishing the account. Be sure you keep these updated because the bank will go by those names and authorizations if there are any questions. It does you no good to go to the bank after 5 years and find that they won't access the account for you and that none of the names on their list are even part of your group anymore.

## Signatures on Checks

Many groups require that at least two people sign checks. While this requirement may sound good it is really a waste of time and does not truly prevent the problems that people think it does.

The supposed purpose is to prevent embezzlement of funds by the Treasurer. If you can't trust the person who is holding the position, don't let them have it. If someone wants to embezzle funds you can't stop them by something as unimportant as a second signature. The only real effect of the 2nd signature is to delay the process whereby the funds of the group can be easily accessed.

There should always be at least two signatures on file with the bank for people who can sign checks, but only one of those should be required on a check. The governing board can limit the amount a check can be written for without prior authorization. Requiring the Treasurer to produce the actual, original bank statements can keep a simple check on the treasury each month.

## Audits

This is also an area of some contention. Everyone seems to think that an audit will uncover all errors and any misappropriations of funds. If this were true companies and banks would never have a problem and they are the experts.

An audit is only as good as the people conducting it and the records supporting it. It does no good to have people who are unfamiliar with accounting procedures and records conduct an audit. It also does not work to have the Treasurer select them nor provide the documentation they use.

Only if you put into place a fairly complex system of checks and balances can you be even remotely assured that the audit will be effective. The only true method of being safe is to have an honest person in the position and to keep up on the information that is available. The governing board should always require some form of regular report accompanied by the original bank records and then they must actually examine what is given to them.

Sometimes knowing that there is a regular and complete review helps keep all parties honest.

## *Constitution and By-laws*

There is a great deal of confusion about exactly what these 2 documents are and what they are intended to accomplish. Basically you can view them as follows;

## Constitution

This document came to represent the foundation stone upon which an organization was based. In it were placed those items that established the fundamental guidelines, principles and purposes that the society felt were essential. The general framework of the governing procedures and the authority were created here.

FAAS offers a sample constitution and bylaws on our website at [http://www.faas.info/sample\\_constitution.html](http://www.faas.info/sample_constitution.html).

This document was viewed as permanent and unchangeable except under difficult procedures involving complicated rules and extraordinary number of votes. As you were attempting to alter the very reasons for which you were

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created and the governing procedures that you had followed from the beginning, it was felt that this should be an unusual act and require the consent of a larger number of the members.

### *By-laws*

This document came to be the one in which the method and manner of accomplishing the purposes stated in the constitution would be achieved.

In this document the duties and responsibilities of the committees are explained, nomination, election, ballots, appointments, membership classifications, reports, etc., etc. are all explained and defined.

As this document dealt with the day to day affairs of the society they had to be more easily altered to meet changes in circumstances that the society meets in the world outside their own group. Changes were often necessitated by outside influences such as Federal, state and local regulations, banking requirements and so on. Since the society had to comply with these changes it was necessary that this document be more flexible and easy to change.

By-laws normally require less notice and a much smaller vote to alter. Perhaps they might also be changed by a smaller group, such as the governing board, rather than requiring the full membership.

One note here on incorporation: While groups may have either or both types of documents corporate governing procedures are normally called just "by-laws". So most, if not all, states refer to attaching copies of your "by-laws" to incorporation requests. Don't be concerned and attach copies of whatever you are using regardless of what you call them it is merely common usage not a legal requirement. You can refer to your governing documents however you want. All the state is interested in is whether you meet their requirements in those documents.

A sample outline of a constitution is included here. It is meant as an example only; you do not have to follow its format, Articles or sections. You will have to adapt to what you need and address your own concerns. This is meant as a guide and should not be viewed as all-inclusive of everything you will need or want.

One of the first things you need to decide before you start is what form of government will you have. You will need to decide upon whether or not you will have just officers, officers and a board of directors, or officers and committee chairs (sometimes called Executive Council/Board). You will need to think about it and what exactly you want the powers, duties and responsibilities of that group, and the individuals in the group, to be.

### *Article I – General Organization and Name*

Section 1. Specify the exact name of your organization. Remember it is difficult to change later on, especially if you have had it published in flyers or have incorporated. People may have a hard time connecting the old and new name.

Section 2. Offices – state the official address – you can just put a statement here saying the governing board will determine the offices.

Section 3. Seal – you can describe what you want as the official seal/emblem or just state that one can be selected later on.

Section 4. Dissolution. Like it or not, all good things can come to an end. While you do not have to specify what will happen in that sad event, it is helpful to do so to make sure that the assets of the group are distributed in a fair manner and to groups or causes you are supportive of. Some states require you make such provisions in your governing documents.

Section 5. Distributions. This applies more to corporations. It has to do with stating to whom and under what circumstances funds or assets of the group can be distributed (spent). Basically you have to state that no individual, officers, directors or member gets any of it and that you can only spend to further the purposes for which you were created,

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## *Article II. Membership and Meetings.*

Section 1. Specify that membership is contingent upon some sort of conditions such as payment of dues, filling out an application and so on. You might also consider an open statement giving the governing group the ability to impose additional requirements as necessary. Just remember – rules must be uniform and apply to all equally within a classification. So if you have voting and non-voting members - there can be different rules for each class but all voting members must be treated the same as all other voting members and all non-voting members treated the same as all other non-voting members.

Section 2. Specify the details of keeping and also ending membership – both by the person and by the society. How does someone resign as a member and how does the group remove someone. Make sure you state that membership is not transferable and that it ends immediately upon death, resignation or expulsion. State the rights of a member to appeal an expulsion and how this is done.

Section 3. Allow the governing body to create additional classes of membership. Maybe you want a corresponding or honorary – if you don't create it specifically or leave the door open, you might find yourself having to amend things.

Section 4. Specify the types of meetings – business, annual, special and regular. What is the purpose of each meeting and who can call them to meet and how, who is entitled to notice about them and what does that notice have to include (date, time, place, reason, etc.) Who can attend and who can vote.

## *Article III – Elections*

If you are going to have a Board and Officers you need to split the 2 as there are usually different requirements and circumstances for each election. This sample assumes a Board of Directors and Officers.

Section 1. How the directors are to be elected and by whom. Majority vote, plurality, top six, whatever you find appropriate.

Section 2. How candidates are selected – floor nominations, self-nominated, nominations committee, combination of each or some of those. Requirements to be a candidate – 21 yrs, member for 1 year, green – whatever you need to help get good nominees.

Section 3. How will the voting be conducted – show of hands, secret ballot.

Section 4. What is a valid vote, what about ties, revotes, challenges, and not enough candidates for all the positions.

Section 5. When do the newly elected people official take their position – immediately, a later date, at a special event, be careful that you do not allow too long a time to expire between election and taking the position. Unless there is a special reason, people should take office immediately upon being elected.

## *Article IV – General Provisions*

This is where you might deal with general guidelines that you want to be fairly unchanged for long periods of time. Normally these would deal with some of these items;

1. How does someone resign. Can I resign from an office without losing my membership, who do I give my resignation too, what if I don't.

2. Specify that resignation, death or forfeiture of membership for any cause and in any fashion operates as an assignment and release to the society and its officers of all right, title and interest of the member in and to all property, estate and funds of the society except those obligations the society may yet owe the previous member.

This protects you from claims arising from a previous member – it is a key legal statement – don't overlook it.

How are dues fees and assessments established – who does it and how. State that only people who have paid all they owe can vote or hold office. When are dues and other fees owed.

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How do you fill a vacancy in a position? Who can select the replacement, how, with what requirements for notice and to who. How long do you have to wait between the position becoming vacant and putting the new person in the office.

### *Article V – Board of Directors*

You need to think about what exactly the Board of Directors are going to do. What is their responsibility, duties, powers, relationship to the officers, and so on. Most groups place the executive power in the BOD – they make the policy decisions and rules – the officers and committees carry out those decisions and handle the day to day operations.

Be careful here – you do not want the BOD to be dictators and you also do not want them to be ineffective and weak. You need to define them so they can act as needed but define what those acts are. Some areas will need broad open-ended powers, others will need to be more narrowly restricted. Also remember you have to give the officers real responsibility and authority so you can't give it all to the BOD.

How will the BOD operate, when does it meet, how does it adopt a proposal, you need to consider what you expect the BOD to accomplish and establish rules that allows them to do that.

### *Article VI – Committees*

Section 1. How are committees created in special circumstances, who determines what special committees do, how is the chairman selected, how do you get rid of them once their job is done.

Section 2. How are the regular chairmen selected. Who approves them, how and when. How do you remove a chairman from his position.

Section 3. Just specify that committees shall perform such other duties as the President or BOD may assign to them. Also specify what happens if 2 committees appear to have an overlap of duties or a conflict over who should be doing what – perhaps allow the president to resolve the situation.

### *Article VII – Officers*

Most people are familiar with the titles – President, V. President, Secretary, and Treasurer – and those are all you really need. Past President, Assistant President, V. President for Committees, Corresponding Secretary, Recording Secretary – are unnecessary positions and dilute the authority of the officers. It also confuses the membership as to who is in charge and whom they should go to for assistance.

You need to specify in here the qualifications to be elected, how they are elected and by whom, how a vacancy in one of these offices is filled, terms of office and any special provisions you may need about unique duties or powers of the officers.

Then you need to take each office and go into detail as to what their duties and powers are. Think about it carefully and don't assume that simply because it works for some other group that it will work for yours. Also do not assume that if you leave something out that everyone will understand that the officer still has that duty or authority. If you don't state it – it doesn't exist and you cannot hold them accountable for what you don't say.

### *Article VIII – Finances*

Section 1. Establish a budget process for submitting, reviewing and approving budgets for committees and the society as a whole. Who approves the budgets and how and when. State how to approve funds that exceed the amount budgeted or to otherwise approve a special circumstance that has arisen.

Section 2. Who can examine the financial records of the society and under what circumstances.

Section 3. Who determines the method of record keeping and accounting for the society and who oversees the process – it should be your treasurer, but you might also have review by the BOD or President.

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Section 4. Specify your fiscal year time period. Unless you have some unique set of circumstances there is no reason to select anything other than Jan 1 – Dec 31, a calendar year. The July 1 – June 30 period is a unique set for business purposes and does not apply to your group.

Section 5. Specify a time limit for money that the treasurer receives to be deposited into the accounts.

Section 6. Specify how funds may be withdrawn (check, draft, order) and that they must be signed by the Treasurer or President. Specify that funds can only be invested or disbursed under the authority and direction of your governing board. Specify that only government insured accounts can be used.

Section 7. Specify that society funds cannot be loaned to any officer or member. State that no officer or member may have or receive any earnings from the society unless they are a paid employee.

## *Article IX – Rules, Amendments*

Specify in here the parliamentary guide you are going to follow –such as Robert’s Rules of Order.

In separate sections specify the manner in which the constitution and by-laws may be amended.

You need to consider the following items:

- Who can submit an amendment
- Who is the amendment submitted to
- What form does it have to be in
- What information must it include
- Who can vote on the amendment
- Who must send the amendment out to be voted on
- When must the vote be returned and where to
- How many votes does it take to accept the amendment
- When does the change take effect

Consider that you probably want to make the process for the constitution more difficult than for the by-laws but do not go too far and make it impossible. It is better to express the vote as a percentage or fraction rather than an actual number.

## *By-laws*

Section 1. Define the classes of membership with the duties and privileges of each.

Section 2. Define the election process for officers and the BOD. Eligibility, term of office, ballots etc. Even if these have been named in the constitution. it was done in general terms – you need to provide the details of making up ballots, mailing them, postmarks and other information.

Section 3. Committees in general – define the duties of the chairs, how people are assigned to committees, how the chair is selected, and how additional duties are assigned to a committee.

Section 4. Specify the names and duties of all regular standing committees. Standing committees are those that will function on either a continuous basis or have a duty that recurs on a regular (even once a year) basis. Committees that are created for a once only purpose should not be specified here.

Section 5. Special committees – these are committees that established to handle a one time purpose— maybe a dinner or honorary award. They will not function or be needed once the purpose for which they were created has been accomplished.

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You need to specify how they are created, how duties are assigned to them and by whom, how the chair is selected and personnel assigned, how they report on their activities and to whom, and the dissolution when finished.

You need to review your own special circumstances and determine if there are other areas that you want to add.

There is no restriction or limits other than what you find practical. Since this area is more easily altered you should feel more comfortable with trying ideas and suggestions.