

# GUIDE TO MANAGING HISTORICAL SOCIETIES

## Managing the Organisation

### Part 1 – Incorporation – Model Rules – Roles of Office Bearers – Mission Statement

Community organisations, including historical societies, need to operate in a legal framework. The organisation should be an incorporated association and follow the Model Rules for incorporated groups or develop its own constitution for managing the group.

#### **Incorporation**

In starting any community organisation it is important to become an Incorporated Association. This establishes a legal structure for the group and, most importantly, protects the management group and members from any liability.

Fees and clear instructions about how to become an Incorporated Association can be found on the Consumer Affairs Victoria website under Business Names and Structure: <http://www.consumer.vic.gov.au>

Kits containing guidelines on how to become incorporated are available from:

Consumer Affairs Victoria  
2nd Floor, 452 Flinders St  
Melbourne VIC 3000

Incorporated societies should be aware of changes made to the *Associations Incorporations Act*.

For a list with dates of amendments and a copy of the *Associations Incorporations Amendments Act 2009* see: <http://tinyurl.com/2exwlm>.

See <http://www.pilch.org.au/aiabill2008/> for details on amendments to the Incorporations Act introduced in 2009.

An article explaining why Victorian groups should incorporate:

[http://www.ourcommunity.com.au/management/management\\_article.jsp?articleId=15](http://www.ourcommunity.com.au/management/management_article.jsp?articleId=15)

#### **Model Rules (or constitution)**

Incorporation also requires the development of a constitution or rules of association. This is, in effect, a contract between the organisation and its members. Examples of model rules can be found at <http://www.consumer.vic.gov.au> under *Associations, Clubs and Fundraising*.

#### **Roles and duties of the office bearers**

Incorporation means that the organisation must establish a management group. This group of people might be called a management committee, directors or board of directors, a council or councillors. The model rules provide examples of traditional positions but heritage organisations should create their own roles within the committee.

The management committee's responsibilities include:

- Setting the direction and creating the policies and programs to plan for and monitor the work of the organisation
- Managing the organisation's funds, ensuring the organisation is financially viable and its assets protected
- Overseeing the organisation's legal functions and responsibilities
- Meeting community expectations and understanding the needs of the membership
- Undertaking responsibility for risk management, including OH&S
- Creating links and networks to the benefit of the organisation
- Delegating responsibilities

The most effective management groups document the roles and responsibilities of each member of the management group.

The *Good Governance Practice for Voluntary Committees of Management* can be found at <http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/pdpd/pdfs/iyvgoodgovernance.pdf>

The *Our Community* website in the Community Resources section – Boards contains excellent resources for developing and managing committees:  
[www.ourcommunity.com.au](http://www.ourcommunity.com.au)

A useful book is *Community Management. VCOSS Manuals for Community Organisations*. Melbourne 2007

### **Examples of office bearers in a historical society**

The roles and responsibilities of office bearers should be clearly defined. The same person may serve two roles.

**President:** Provides leadership, coordinates the activities, delegates authority for specific tasks and speaks represents the group. Chairs committee meetings and works with the secretary regarding preparation of the agenda. The President builds links with local government, press, libraries, local industries and other groups with similar aims.

**Vice- President (s):** supports the President by keeping fully up to date with the affairs of the group and deputizes for President's role as required. In larger groups, there can be two Vice Presidents and are usually responsible for chairing subcommittees such as library, publicity or programs committees. A Vice President is often seen to be in training for the position of President, or may be a past President

**Treasurer:** handles, records and reports on income and expenditure, cash flow, bank accounts and advises on the organizations finances. The treasurer is responsible for paying bills, banking and petty cash. Some organization use cashbooks and it is the responsibility of the treasurer to manage that. The treasurer prepares the annual budget and is responsible for making sure financial reports are available to the management group.

(For further information on role of treasurer see Finance section of this guide and <http://ourcommunity.au/resources>

**Secretary/ies:** to oversee the administration and record keeping of the Society by managing all documentation, including correspondence, minutes and preparing for meetings. Some groups have a number of secretaries; a minutes secretary, correspondence secretary, research secretary and membership secretary. From 1 December 2011 secretaries will also undertake the role of the Public Officer.

**Promotions or Publicity Officer:** promotes the society by liaising with local media, prepares newsletters and brochures, and seeks out all opportunities to promote the society within the community.

**Collections Manager:** is responsible for care of collections, implementation of collections of policy and exhibitions

**Public Officer:** is the main point of contact between the organisation and Consumer Affairs Victoria. From 1 December 2011 the role of the public officer will be undertaken by the Secretary of the organisation – <http://tinyurl.com/2478bae>.

An induction guide, providing basic information about the organisation, should be prepared for all new members responsible for managing the organisation.

The management group of the organisation should meet regularly and follow a formal agenda. Minutes must be kept of the meetings.

### **Mission Statement**

In the process of becoming incorporated, developing a constitution or set of rules, a mission statement should be developed.

A Mission Statement, also known as a Statement of Purpose defines the broad aims of the organisation. In summary form, usually one or two sentences, the Mission Statement includes primary reason for existence of the organisation and lists the prime functions. For historical societies and museums the geographical area covered, the time period and / or main subject interest may be considered when formulating a Mission Statement.

It is important to develop and approve the Mission Statement as a group because it forces the members of the organisation to identify, reflect and agree on the main activity of the organisation. Mission statements can take a long time to agree upon but in the end the phrase or sentences may be very simple; the most important thing is that its meaning is understood.

Funding bodies often require mission statements, so it is important that the statement best reflects the objectives of the organisation.

Information on developing mission statements can be found at:

- *reCollections* vol 1 (managing collections section)  
<http://archive.amol.org.au/reollections/4/2/03.htm>
- *MAP forward planning template* (Museums Australia Victoria) includes a section on creating a Mission Statement  
[http://www.mavic.asn.au/assets/MAP\\_Forward\\_Planning\\_Template.doc](http://www.mavic.asn.au/assets/MAP_Forward_Planning_Template.doc)

- Notes on Museum Planning – Western Australian Museum, Museum Assistance Program  
<http://www.museum.wa.gov.au/services/map/documents/MuseumPlanning.doc>

Some examples of Mission Statements:

- *Whitehorse Historical Society Inc.*  
The purpose of the Society is to foster historical interest and knowledge. To collect, document, research, preserve and exhibit items that show how people have lived and worked in the development of the Whitehorse area from human settlement until the present day.
- *Box Hill Historical Society Inc.*  
The Box Hill Historical Society seeks to collect, preserve, facilitate, access, research and communicate items that reflect life in and the development of Box Hill and district.
- *Victorian Jazz Archive Inc.*  
This not-for-profit Incorporated Association was established to:  
Collect, exhibit, preserve and store on a permanent basis all material and memorabilia of whatever nature pertaining to jazz music, performed and/or composed by Australian musicians, covering the period from the 1920s through to the present day.  
Collect and store recordings of jazz produced outside Australia, to be used as a reference source.
- *Jewish Museum of Australia*  
The Jewish Museum of Australia is a community museum, which aims to explore and share the Jewish experience in Australia and benefit Australia's diverse society. The Jewish Museum of Australia is committed to being a respected and innovative cultural centre, recognised nationally for its excellence in exhibitions, education programs and collection management.