

How to Set Up a Nongovernmental Organisation

Greenpeace and the Red Cross are powerful examples of nongovernmental organizations. NGOs help millions of people around the globe, doing things that for whatever reason (lack of money, infrastructure or interest) governments don't do, typically in the areas of the environment, education, health care and human rights. NGOs can operate locally (working to block construction of a cell tower) or internationally (promoting economic development, education, health care). If you have an issue you feel passionate about, start your own NGO.

🕒Steps:

1. Clarify your goals and target a country or region to work in. Write a strong, specific mission statement, such as providing schooling for Nepalese girls who otherwise might be sold into prostitution. See 374 Sharpen the Focus of an Organization.
2. Research your issue exhaustively. Find out what other NGOs have done, and if their mission has any crossover with your core issues. Forming an alliance with other NGOs or grassroots organizations can greatly boost your power and influence.
3. Develop the bylaws, the set of rules under which the organization will operate. These include the board of directors' makeup and nomination process, financial management, project implementation, and how to amend the bylaws.
4. Establish a board of directors to help develop and implement policy (see 217 Form a Board of Directors).
5. Design and implement your programs. Track results and refine policies until they align with stated goals. If you aren't ready to make a go of it alone, try out what you want to do under the wing of an NGO whose core mission fits closely with yours. You'll benefit significantly from its expertise and in-country contacts without going through the huge headache of getting 501(c)(3) status. You'll enjoy fiscal sponsorship from the NGO and be able to raise money in its name. The NGO benefits because you expand its effectiveness with minimal administrative costs.
6. Register your NGO with the country's public authorities as well as with the target community to ensure acceptability, and build trust, and program and project effectiveness.
7. Apply for tax-exempt status in the country where your NGO does its work. If you plan to raise money from U.S. donors, it's crucial that you have 501(c)(3) status as well. The process may take several years and it's not assured that you'll receive the status.
8. Start raising cash for your cause. Target individuals as well as foundations and philanthropists (see 381 Plan a Fund-Raising Event). You'll need a plan in place for securing donations for short-term and long-term programs. Ask for in-kind donations as well, such as computers, desks and other office equipment.

Overall Tips:

- ◆ Research what other groups are doing and discuss strategies at the NGO Cafe' (www.gdrc.org/ngo/ncafe-ks.html).
- ◆ Check with the local government registry or a similar agency to see if the proposed name of your organization is already in use.
- ◆ Become a visible figure. Talk to elected officials and policy makers regularly. Fill them in on national and global events affecting your issue. Force them to debate the subject.
- ◆ See www.irs.gov/eo for taxexemption information for U.S. charitable organizations.
- ◆ Apply for a nonprofit bulkmail permit to receive additional discounts. Contact a local post office and request the necessary information.
- ◆ See 404 Build a School in a Third World Country.
- ◆ An NGO can consist of just one or two people, or many. It is always self-governing and has voluntary and/or paid positions.
- ◆ Aim high to receive consultative status with the United Nations' Economic and Social Council. The 1,500 NGOs with this status may send observers to public meetings of the council and its subsidiary bodies, and may submit written statements relevant to the council's work.

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