

## General Guidance on How to Start a Society in B.C.

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Please note: This document is for reference only, FPCC is not able to provide advice on setting up a society. For general information on how to set up and register a society, including helpful links, resources, and help desk information, please go to [Not-for-profit organizations - Province of British Columbia \(gov.bc.ca\)](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/industry/not-for-profit-organizations).

### Definition of a Society

A society is a not-for-profit corporation created and run in B.C. Societies may be formed for any lawful purpose or purposes, including agricultural, artistic, benevolent, charitable, educational, environmental, patriotic, philanthropic, political, professional, recreational, religious, scientific, social and sporting. If a society is seeking grant funding, FPCC requires it to be incorporated, meaning that it must be registered as a society with the B.C. government.

Societies are independent, democratic organizations that must comply with the [Societies Act](#) and their own constitution and bylaws. Societies do not earn any profits for its members. All money is donated to the organization's cause or goal.

To complete the process of setting up and registering a society, please go to [Societies Online \(bcregistry.ca\)](https://www.bcregistry.ca).

### How to Start a Society

#### 1. Define the Society's Purpose

The purpose is the type of cause, activity or support the society will promote. It could include any of the following purposes or types of activities: Agricultural, artistic, benevolent, charitable, educational, environmental, patriotic, philanthropic, political, professional, recreational, religious, scientific, social, or sporting.

A purpose cannot include operating a business for profit or gain. The purpose becomes part of the society's constitution. It needs to comply with the Societies Act. Here's an example of a society's constitution (name and purpose):

*Soul Sisters Circle*

The purposes of the society are to:

- Provide cultural mentorship opportunities for youth and young adults
- Engage youth in the implementation of cultural projects and land-based activities

## 2. Set up Bylaws

Option 1: Adopt the model bylaws without any changes. The model bylaws can be downloaded from the BC Government website ([Not-for-profit organizations - Province of British Columbia \(gov.bc.ca\)](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/socdev/ncs/ncs.html)). They provide a framework of basic procedural rules for new societies. Before adopting these bylaws, make sure they're suitable and relevant for your society.

Option 2: Create your own bylaws. Use the model bylaws as a guide or start from scratch. You should get legal advice if you require assistance in drafting or changing bylaws. A society's bylaws need to:

- Comply with the Societies Act and contain the matters (provisions) required by Section 11 of the Societies Act
- Be written in English
- Be in a format that can be uploaded, copied and compared (DOC, DOCX, PDF, RTF, TXT or WPS)

## 3. Assign Directors

A director is responsible for managing a society. Each person incorporating the society (incorporator) usually also becomes a director, but this is not required. An ordinary society must have at least 3 directors. One of them must be a resident in B.C. A [member-funded society](#) needs one director. They do not need to be a B.C. resident.

A director must be qualified under the Societies Act and the bylaws of the society. They must:

- Be an individual – not an organization or a corporation
- Be at least 18 years old – [younger directors may be permitted under certain conditions](#)
- Be capable of managing their own affairs
- Not be undergoing bankruptcy
- Have not been convicted of fraud or corporate offence within the last five years
- Meet any qualifications noted in the society's bylaws

Important note: In order for a society to be eligible for FPCC grants, FPCC requires that at least 75% of the directors are from a B.C. First Nation.

#### 4. Request a Name

Societies must have their name approved and confirm that it doesn't conflict with a name already being used by a corporation. This makes sure that the public is not confused or misled by a society's name. It takes about 7 to 14 days to process a name request. Once it's complete, you'll receive a name request number you can use to incorporate (register) the society. The fee to request and reserve a society name is \$30. To check if the name you would like to choose for your society is already being used, please go to this website: [Name Request \(bcregistry.ca\)](http://bcregistry.ca).

#### 5. Incorporate the Society

Once you get your name reserved (the provincial registrar will send you an email), you can complete the incorporation (registration) process online. Have the information you've prepared on hand — like a copy of your purpose and bylaws and the names and addresses of your directors. You'll also need a credit card for the filing fee. The filing fee to register the society is \$100.

You can use the name confirmation email from the registrar to get the incorporation process started via Societies online. Once you're done, you'll get a copy of your incorporation documents via email or in the mail.

You may want to get advice from a chartered accountant or lawyer before setting up a society.

#### 6. Open a Bank Account

Next, you can take your incorporation documents to a bank or credit union to get a bank account set up. But before you do, the board should have a discussion about internal controls, with questions like:

- Who will have access to our banking?
- How many of us have to sign a society contract for it to be valid?
- Is there a dollar threshold beyond which we want two (or more) people to sign off on a banking transaction?

Typically, you need to be a director or officer of your society to have signing authority over the bank account. So when you go to open the account, make sure someone in that position is present, and has two pieces of ID.

### **Maintaining a Society**

1. Protect Personal Information

Societies are legally obligated to protect any personal information that they collect, use or disclose. This includes information about customers, clients, employees or others. To learn more about protecting personal information, please go to [Protecting Personal Information – Province of British Columbia \(gov.bc.ca\)](#).

2. Hold an Annual Meeting and File an Annual Report

Legislative amendments now allow societies the option of holding fully virtual meetings on a permanent basis. A society may choose to hold a meeting either fully electronically, partially electronically or in person and restrict or set out requirements for electronic meetings in its articles, rules or bylaws.

Each calendar year, incorporated (registered) societies must hold an annual general meeting (AGM). To maintain good standing they must also file an annual report. The report must be filed within 30 days after the annual general meeting and the filing fee is \$40. Societies do not need to hold an annual general meeting or file an annual report the year they incorporate. The society must keep records/minutes of general meetings of members.

Find information about agenda items for annual general meetings in section 71 of the Societies Act.

Note: For more information on maintaining a society, please refer to the Societies Act ([gov.bc.ca](#))