



STARTING A NATIONAL IFUW FEDERATION OR ASSOCIATION

Welcome!

Helping to form an IFUW national federation or association (NFA) is an exciting and challenging experience! IFUW staff and elected leaders are available to provide advice; however, the momentum for creating a group must come from the-graduate women within the country concerned.

1. Who can become a member?

Any woman graduate who has an approved qualification from a university or institution of comparable academic standing can become a member of IFUW.

IFUW recognizes degrees, diplomas, or equivalent qualification for which study at an institution of higher education was required. All women who have been accepted for a master's or doctoral programme at a recognized tertiary institution are eligible for IFUW membership.

In order to be affiliated to IFUW, a national federation or association must be open to all women graduates residing in the country, irrespective of race, nationality, religion or political opinion.

Membership, with the same rights and privileges, must be open to both citizens and non-nationals living in the country. IFUW affiliates include not only women working in educational settings, but also women graduates from professions such as medicine, engineering, business and the media, as well as women who are not currently professionally active.

National federations and associations are expected to support and promote the basic principles and commitments of IFUW.

IFUW is committed to being the leading graduate women's organization empowering women and girls through lifelong education for leadership, decision-making and peace. Its four priorities include promotion of the education of the girl child, adult literacy for women, access to and the advancement of women in higher education, and empowering women to be leaders and decision makers.

IFUW seeks to attract groups that are actively addressing social and economic problems facing their communities and women in particular.

IFUW national affiliates are encouraged to develop strong programmes to stimulate individual members and motivate their participation in decision-making at the local, national and international levels. Throughout the world IFUW federations and associations are conducting community projects, carrying out important research and lobbying their respective governments on issues of special concern to women and girls.

International Federation of University Women

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2. How to Begin

Appoint a temporary chairperson to call an informal meeting of interested graduate women and a small group to assist her in organizing the meeting. If there are existing groups of graduate women in the country, be sure to invite them to take part.

Prepare an agenda and ask someone to take formal minutes (a written record of the proceeding).

Distribute and discuss information on IFUW principles and work.

- Discuss advantages of membership in the International Federation.
- Decide whether to accept IFUW standards and criteria

Discuss possible goals and objectives for the national group based on IFUW values.

- Find out what prospective members expect from membership in the organization.
- Inquire about the kinds of activities in which they would like to participate.
- Encourage input as to the roles they would envision the organization fulfilling at the local, national and international levels.

Elect provisional officials by democratic process, including a Coordinator for International Relations (CIR). If only a few women attend the first meeting, appoint temporary leaders for a short, fixed term and plan to elect new leaders at a later meeting.

Develop plans for the formation of local branches and/or electronic networks to link members.

Plan an initial project or activity that can be completed within a short period of time (such as a public seminar or a career awareness day for girls in a local school).

Appoint a small committee to draw up a constitution in conformity with the Model Constitution (<http://www.ifuw.org/join/model-constitution.pdf>), to be submitted to the IFUW Membership Committee for comment and approval.

Arrange the date and place of a national meeting for representatives from the different local branches/regions to come together to consider and adopt the constitution, make financial provisions and elect officers and committees. Normally this meeting should take place between six months and a year following the first meeting.

If meetings will be held in the interim, arrange the date and place of the next meeting. Inform all branches/structures and interested individuals.

In addition to the Coordinator for International Relations, who liaises with IFUW, it would be useful to appoint a Public Relations Officer to give publicity to activities and a Newsletter Editor to keep branches and members informed of developments. An Advocacy Liaison Representative would also be an advantage.

A minimum of 20 paid up members are required to start and maintain an NFA.

You may want to use the IFUW training materials (<http://www.ifuw.org/training>) for support and guidance when working on the various areas mentioned above.

3. IMPORTANT STEPS

3.1 Envision the Aims of the Organization

It is very important to define the basic aims of the organization, the long-term goals or purpose of the organization and to set some short-term objectives for how you plan to accomplish these. The initial goals may evolve over time as the group grows and gains experience, but members will find it easier to support a group if there are clearly identifiable reasons for its existence.

The process used is as important as the aims themselves. Members are more likely to remain active if they have a say in helping to shape the organization and plan for its future.

3.2 Establish a Structure

The structure chosen for the organization should be as open and democratic as possible. You should provide for regular meetings in which all members may have a say and opportunities for many members to take leadership or decision-making roles.

All IFUW national affiliates should provide for a regularly-scheduled Conference or General Assembly that is the supreme authority of the organization. It should be open to any member who wishes to attend. In some associations this body meets annually; in others meetings are held every two or three years. The Conference or General Assembly is normally responsible for establishing policy, approving financial and other reports, setting membership fees, electing officers, and amending the constitution and by-laws.

All IFUW national affiliates should provide for a Board of Officers or Executive Committee, usually comprised of a president, one or more vice-presidents, a secretary, a treasurer, and the Coordinator for International Relations (CIR). Some include the chairpersons of standing committees, others include branch presidents or one or two members-at-large (members where no branch exists). It is preferable that the national officers be from different parts of the country or that the Board of Officers rotate from region to region. Wider representation facilitates communication and cooperation among members.

IFUW requires that provision be made for the regular election of executive members and that there be limits on the maximum length of service for officers. Most IFUW affiliates set the term of office at either two or three years. IFUW recommends strongly that members serving on the Board of Officers or Executive Committee be limited to two consecutive terms, except to serve as president for one further term.

Some of our larger associations and federations that require their Conference or General Assembly to meet only once every two or three years also provide for a Council, which meets at more frequent intervals, once or twice a year. The Council takes decisions necessary to the activities of the organization between meetings of the Conference or General Assembly. In most cases the Council is comprised of the Board of Officers and representatives of each of the local branches/regions.

In order to share work responsibilities and to provide a wider opportunity for leadership roles, most national groups also provide for standing committees covering areas such as finance, membership development, programme, projects, international relations, and publicity.

3.3 Initiate a Programme of Activities

The programme is the heart of an organization. Its quality helps determine whether you attract new members and maintain the interest of those who joined originally.

IFUW has a federation-wide programme theme that provides a common basis for the work in all national federations and associations. The 2007-2010 theme is "Women - Agents for Change: Building Sustainable Futures".

Be sure to ask prospective members what they expect from the organization and about the kinds of activities in which they would like to be involved. In today's world, most women balance work and home commitments which leave little time for outside activities. They are more likely to be active in organizations which meet their needs and priorities.

Many new organizations make the mistake of trying to go in many different directions at once. Past experience shows that it is extremely important, especially for new groups, to focus efforts in the beginning on one or two projects or programme activities that can have visible results within a reasonable period of time. This brings a sense of success and accomplishment that can motivate members and assure their continued participation. Ensure the involvement and integration in decision making of members of all ages at all levels, accommodating new and younger members and their ideas. Even when a suggestion may not be fully taken up a fresh approach can often provide a worthwhile stimulus for the NFA.

3.4 Form Local Branches

Most IFUW national federations and associations are comprised of local groups or sections, often called branches. These local units are linked together in the national body, which in turn is affiliated with IFUW. IFUW's communication is with the national federation or association and through it to the local branches and individual members.

National affiliates need to make a clear distinction between the national and local levels. The national organization should be a separate, distinct body in which all branches throughout the country participate on an equal basis. All of the branches together form the national organization, decide on the national programme and elect national leaders. Even if the national association is started in a single city, provision should be made from the beginning for both a national and a local structure (using electronic communication, for example).

One example is France, where there are local groups in Paris, Dijon, Bordeaux, Strasbourg and other cities. The French Association has a fixed national headquarters in Paris that is separate from the Paris branch. One term the national president may be from Paris and the CIR from Grenoble; another term the President may be from Dijon and the CIR from Bordeaux.

Another example is the New Zealand Federation, which moves its national headquarters every three years. One triennium the headquarters is in Christchurch, another triennium in Wellington, and another time in Auckland. There are five branches in New Zealand and the order of the rotation of the headquarters is written down in the organization's constitution.

In Germany the national headquarters for practical reasons often moves to the town where the branch of the national president is located.

Branches should be formed in as many cities as possible, including the capital city. It is possible to have more than one branch in the same city, especially in large urban areas. This allows for greater ease of access and accommodation of a wider range of interests. Individual branches have their own officers and local programmes, but cooperate with the other branches in joint action around national goals and programmes.

The steps for creating local branches are exactly the same as those described for a national association or federation: identifying and bringing together interested women graduates, envisioning the aims and purpose of the branch, developing a local programme and establishing the structure.

Members-at-large should be included in national/local activities wherever possible.

3.5 Prepare the Constitution and By-laws

Once the major decisions about goals and basic structure have been taken, the next step is to prepare the group's constitution and by-laws. The IFUW Membership Committee must approve these before affiliation to IFUW will be granted.

IFUW provides a model to assist new groups in drafting a constitution. The model includes the key elements that must be present in all national constitutions. It is possible for groups to include additional provisions, provided they do not conflict with IFUW 's principles.

It is strongly recommended that new associations send a draft of their constitution to IFUW Headquarters for comment before submitting the document for formal ratification by members. This avoids having to call a special meeting later to amend the constitution, should the IFUW Membership Committee find any problems.

3.6 Develop a Communication Strategy

As your organization grows, you will want to keep your members up to date with what is happening within your organization and about IFUW activities. Having a specially appointed person or committee responsible for publicity can help accomplish this.

Most IFUW national affiliates publish a newsletter or bulletin, which appears monthly or quarterly, announcing coming events, summarizing important decisions, featuring outstanding achievements by individual members or branches, and providing a forum for short articles and discussion on issues of current concern to the membership.

The local newspaper, television and radio media can be a useful resource for your group, if used properly. Do not limit yourself to announcing the dates and subjects of your meetings. Try to develop links with local journalists, particularly those who are women graduates. Invite them to join your group. Provide them with short press releases on up-coming or recently completed activities. This can be an effective and free means of publicity for your organization.

The IFUW website – www.ifuw.org - is an excellent resource. National affiliates who do not have their own individual websites are welcome to have a special section within the IFUW site. There is no charge for this.

3.7 Establish a Dues Collection System

A process should be set up for collecting dues from each member to cover the annual dues payable to IFUW, to support the operation of the national organization and the branches and to finance national and local programmes. IFUW does not provide direct funding for the internal activities of its national affiliates.

Annual dues must be paid to IFUW on 1 January of each year. These are calculated on a per capita basis of 18 Swiss francs per member. A special formula based on membership numbers and gross national income (GNI) reduces this for many countries. IFUW will be pleased to calculate this for your group.

The first dues payment must be paid at the time of admission. Details will be provided.

3.8 Complete the Admission Process

Once your group has recruited a minimum of 20 members and has established its purpose and aims, you may apply formally for admission to IFUW by submitting a completed application form along with a copy of your constitution and by-laws to the IFUW Membership Committee for consideration. If there are any problems with provision of the constitution, the IFUW Membership Committee will work with you to find solutions. When the Membership Committee is satisfied that the constitution is in good order and that your group meets all the criteria to join IFUW, it will make a recommendation to the IFUW Council, which is responsible for the decision. This process normally takes several months.

New NFAs undergo a 3 year probationary period before they gain permanent status. During the probationary period the IFUW Membership Committee will be willing to provide support and guidance.

RECAP OF STEPS

- Read and accept IFUW's aims and objectives
- Use the IFUW Model Constitution to develop a constitution for your NFA
- Ensure correct and adequate structures, including communication structures, are set up
- Involve as many graduate women as possible nationally
- Set up a realistic project or programme, making use of the IFUW resource material
- Submit your constitution to the IFUW Headquarters/Membership Committee
- Have a minimum of 20 paid up members
- Fill in the Application Form