

BY-LAWS: THE FOUNDATION OF YOUR ORGANIZATION

Although very casual, informal parks groups can run well without by-laws, more organized groups find that by-laws, even simple ones, are needed to give their group the structure they need. By-laws can be short and sweet or long and detailed. Your core planning group should decide how much information to put into the by-laws based on your organization's needs. Though some groups choose to write highly legalistic by-laws right away, it's probably best to start simple and let the by-laws get more complicated as the group does.

For examples of by-laws you can use as a template for drafting your own, visit the Foundation Center website: www.fdncenter.org.

WHY WRITE BY-LAWS?

- ✓ By-laws spell out an organization's purpose, its decision-making procedures, and its leadership structure. This can be helpful for groups which anticipate multiple changes in leadership (such as a youth group) or an influx of new members.
- ✓ By-laws are required in order to incorporate or get tax-exempt status.

ELEMENTS OF BY-LAWS:

- ✓ Group's mission/purpose
- ✓ Membership requirements (e.g., residency of a particular neighborhood, age restrictions, etc.)
- ✓ Organizational structure (officers, election procedures, etc.)
- ✓ Meeting time/frequency
- ✓ How decisions are made
- ✓ Procedure for amendments to the by-laws

EACH MEMBER OF THE GROUP SHOULD RECEIVE A COPY OF THE BY-LAWS WHEN THEY JOIN.

Adapted from "Tools & Tactics for Building Neighborhood Organizations," Citizens for NYC, www.citizensnyc.org.