



How to start



a Humanist organization

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GARY MCLELLAND

IHEU Chief Executive

Humanism is growing faster than ever, everywhere.

Well-established humanist organizations are growing and broadening their work, while new communities rise up in every part of the world.

We conceived this guide primarily for new and developing humanist organizations. In a spirit of solidarity and international cooperation, we asked all our existing Member Organizations to provide their advice and examples of real-life experiences for the new generation of humanist organizations.

It is with their help that we created this guide in six chapters, which is only the first of a 4-part resource to help Humanist organizations at all levels.

The IHEU publishes this guide with the hope that it will further the ongoing development of Humanism worldwide. The growth and development of organized humanism may seem unstoppable, but it does depend on the daily efforts of each of us to go on.

London, 31 August 2017

Goals and scope



Click on most logos and thumbnails to open links to documents and websites

Look for consensus on your aims

Before even thinking about the name of your organization and its constitution, you should think carefully about your purposes. The purposes of the organization will determine its goals and its range of activities. The more clearly you can state your purposes the more easily everything else will follow.

Hopefully you will have a group of founding members. At this stage you should try to obtain consensus on your purposes among the founding members of your organization.

Of course, in the future, there will probably be debate about how you will achieve your goals. But at this stage everyone has to be “on the same page” concerning the purposes of the organization, because what you want defines who you are, especially in the case of a brand new humanist organization.



Short and long term goals

Once you have decided your main long-term purposes, fix some intermediate goals.

Think of it like a sports game: your purpose is to win the game, so you have to score the goals along the way!

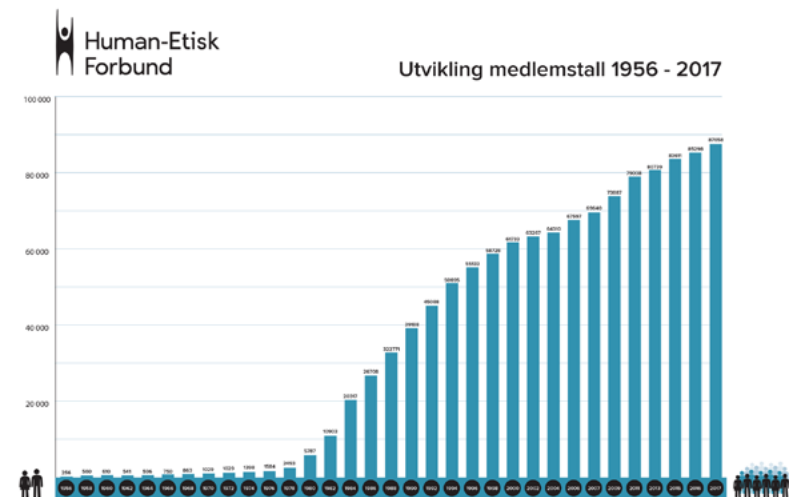
Some will be shorter-term goals, like getting the organization started, while others will be longer-term.

Let’s say for instance that one of your main purposes is to introduce humanist ceremonies in your country. In that case a possible list of goals could be:

- By the end of the first year - train 10 humanist celebrants;
- By the same date - create a website to promote and manage humanist ceremonies;
- By the end of the second year - celebrate at least 30 ceremonies;

- In the third year - create a campaign, the aim of which is to gain legal recognition of humanist ceremonies in your country.

This way of conceiving your purposes, and the goals needed to achieve your purposes, not only will help you drafting a strategic plan (see the paragraph below), but it will also allow you to find a good balance between idealism and realism.



The incredible growth of members of the Norwegian Humanist Association in between 1956 and 2017 - click on the image for more information



How wide is your horizon?

While defining your purposes, you need to think about fixing the scope of your organization, that is, how wide your operating range will be. This is not about how many active members your organization can count at the moment, nor how many resources you have at your disposal, but rather how wide the extent of your action will be.

For example, you can work - from the smallest to the largest scope:

- On an urban scale, organizing local events and humanist campaigns in your city;
- On a regional scale, doing the same in your region, county, or state in case of federal states;

- On a national scale, working for humanism in your country, no matter where your headquarters are;
- On an international scale, coordinating the work of different national organizations on a same humanist subject.

Strategic plan outlines

Writing a good strategic plan is the key for every successful organization in all fields. Indeed, it allows you to better understand the specificity of your situation and, consequently, how you could best adapt to it in order to reach your goals and purposes.

Think about it: to achieve the same exact goal, two organizations around the world can be forced to adopt two radically different strategies, given that every country has a different history, its own particularities, its unique social, cultural, and political tradition. That is why you have to carefully ponder what approach to use.

Be aware then that adopting the same strategies used by other bigger, consolidated organizations worldwide may prove to be wrong

in your case, for plenty of factors - for example because maybe in your country people is not familiar with the term “Humanism”, or because of the government hostility, etc.

That said, to write a good strategic plan you can use some standard conceptual tools that have proven to be valid for all situations. For example, a powerful tool to understand your organization’s potentiality and criticalities is the so-called SWOT analysis.



SWOT helps you to identify in a graphically useful way your organization’s internal strengths and weaknesses, as well as its external opportunities and threats.

Follow the link for more info on SWOT and on how to write a good strategic plan:

forbes.com/sites/davelavinsky/2013/10/18/strategic-plan-template-what-to-include

Examples from our MOs

Click on the images to download examples of strategic plan, one from the American Humanist Association, the other from the Humanistisch Verbond:



Constitution and bylaws



Your values, your identity

All Humanist organizations share a common set of Humanist values. However, every organization is unique because of the cultural and political context, the individuals involved, and the situation in which you find yourself.

Your constitution should reflect both the universality of the humanist values and the circumstances which are unique to your organization.

A definitive point of reference for Humanist values is the Amsterdam Declaration. This is the official defining statement of world Humanism. First made in 1952 in Amsterdam during the first World Humanist Congress and updated on the 50th anniversary in 2002, the Amsterdam Declaration describes what Humanism is and what humanists stand for. You can find multiple translations of the Amsterdam Declaration here:

iheu.org/humanism/the-amsterdam-declaration/

The Amsterdam Declaration

the official defining statement
of World Humanism

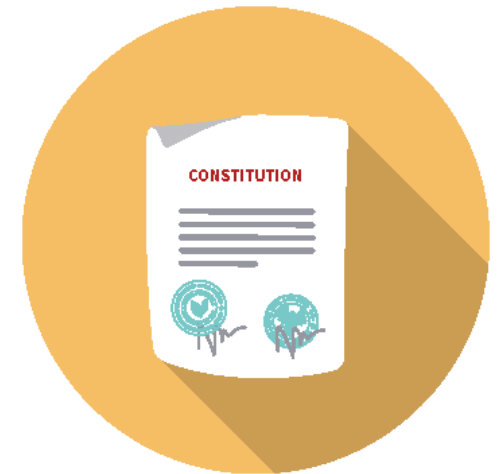


In future your organization may consider to join the IHEU as a Member Organization - we will show you how to do it in the second section of the guide.

For now, you may want to consider that in joining the IHEU, organizations agree that their own objects (purposes) must be compatible with the objects of the IHEU, which are ([Bylaws 2](#)):

to promote Humanism throughout the world, to develop Humanism as a life stance, to represent organized Humanism in international bodies, to defend human rights and the rights of humanists, to develop organized Humanism in every part of the world and to build a strong and effective global organization.

A local or national organization would not have the exact same objects as this, but as an IHEU Member Organization your objects should not contradict the objects of the IHEU.



A constitution can be defined as *a list of basic principles and laws of a social group that determine the powers and duties of the members and guarantee certain rights to the people in it.*

You can draw on the examples on next page to inform your constitution.

Indicate in your constitution the values that you want to promote and defend. These values will define the identity of your organization and in the future will always be there when you have to take hard strategic and executive decisions.



Bylaws

Once you have listed your basic principles and values, you will need to define the internal rules of your organization. This may include the roles within the organization, the rules for elections, the frequency of general meetings, the procedure to become a member, and so on.

At this stage, you can decide to either include the internal rules in your constitution or to write a separate document named “Bylaws”, “Internal rules”, “Statute”, or similar. It is up to you whether to differentiate between your Constitution and your Bylaws. The advantage in keeping these documents separate is that:

- your values and principles will stand above your internal rules, as a more general guide, which will need to be amended less often;
- usually a constitutional change will require democratic input from the members, whereas an elected board or executive committee may be empowered to make changes to your internal rules when the situation requires.

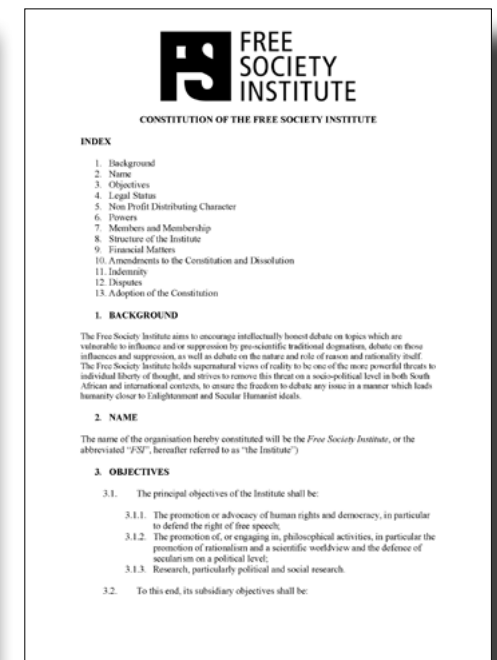
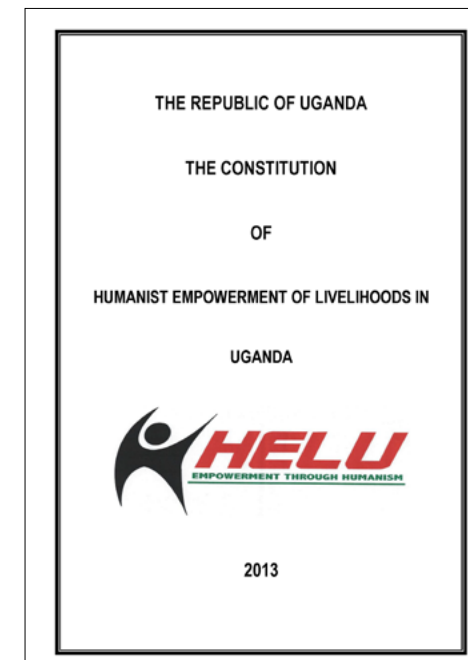
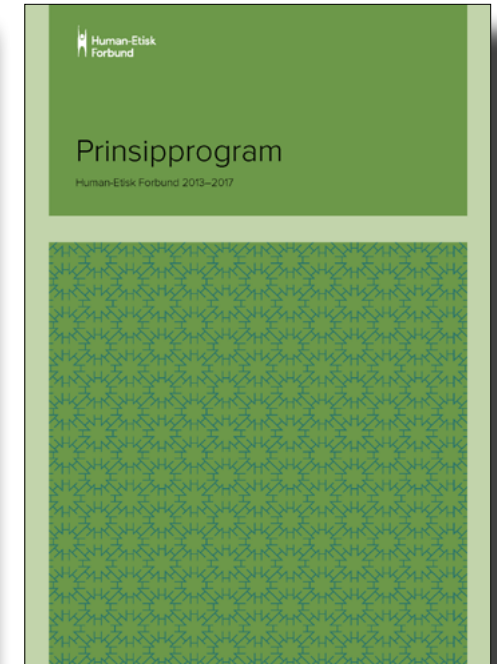
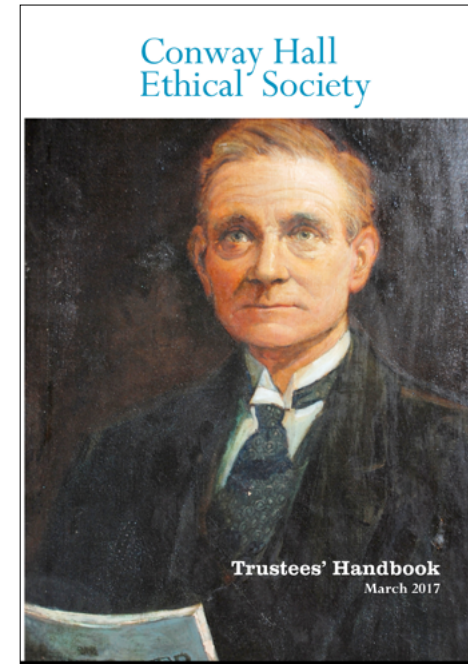
Examples from our Members

On most websites of IHEU Member Organisations you can easily find examples of constitutions and bylaws - to see the list of our MOs websites follow the link below:

<http://iheu.org/membership/our-members/>

Clicking on the images aside you can download instead examples of different constitutional documents from 4 IHEU Member Organizations:

- HELU Uganda
- Human-Etisk Forbund
- Conway Hall Ethical Society
- Free Society Institute



Internal rules



You can have as many internal rules as you need, customizing the bylaws to your particular needs, but in general, as a democratic organization, you should include at least the following:

Roles

An article specifying in detail the different roles in your organization. Most civil society organizations will have at least a President or Chairperson, a Vice-President, a Treasurer, a fixed number of Board members, and Individual supporters.

In this article you have to include for how long the office will be held by someone elected into that role, how they will be elected, and the responsibilities of each position.

Elections

An article specifying how often there will be elections for the above-specified roles, the

procedures for voting and a definition of who is eligible to vote.

General assemblies

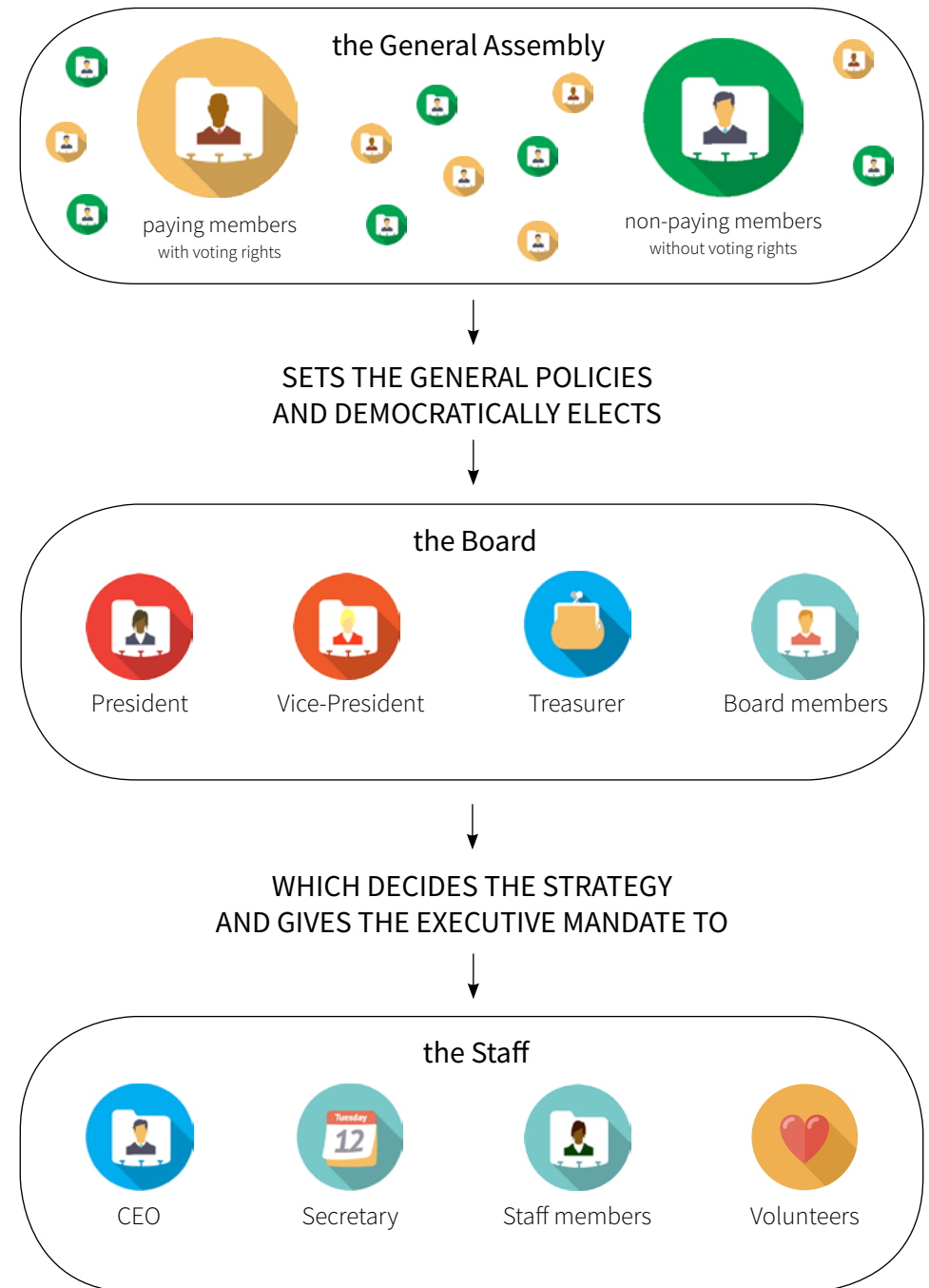
An article stating the procedure and the frequency with which your organization will hold a General Assembly (or General Meeting).

This should also state the powers and duties of the General Assembly, procedures for proposing motions to the meeting, defining who can take part, and how many votes are need for a quorum.

Membership fees

An article defining the methods by which an individual can become a member of your organization, the amount of money he/she has to pay, what goes with the membership fee, etc.

Right you can see a possible organization structure - it is only one example among the many others.

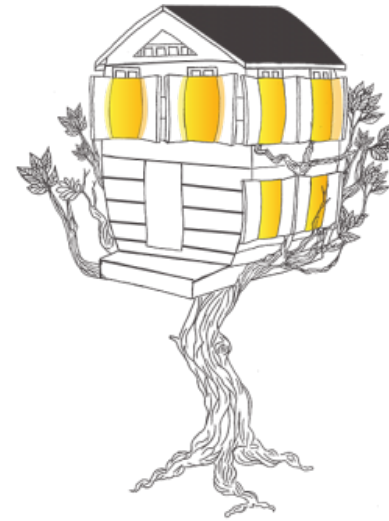




Click on logos



Naming and branding



URBAN HOUSE
SURINAME



Now that you defined the basic principles and the internal rules it is time to find the right name and a good brand that describe and reflect the identity of your organization.

You have plenty of options available, as the variety of names and logos chosen by IHEU Member Organizations testifies - see examples aside.

One organization, many names

The IHEU has Member Organizations from across the non-religious spectrum. There are many organizations with “Humanist” in the name, as well as organizations that use “Atheist”, “Freethought”, “Secular” and so on. We also admit organizations which embody humanist values but which define themselves in some other way, for example the “Centre for Civil Courage” (Croatia), and “Urban House” (Suriname).

Tips for the name

Notice that in general there has been a tendency in recent years to adopt shorter names, for example the British Humanist Association became “Humanists UK”, and the Guatemalan Secular Humanist Association became “Humanistas Guatemala” - see aside. A shorter name maybe easier to remember and more effective in your official written and oral communications.

You may want to consider adopting both a “legal name”, longer and more detailed, and a “business name”, shorter and more immediate, as in the case of “Bogotá Corporation for the Advancement of Reason and Secularism”, better known as simply “Bogotá Atea”. Similarly, many organizations are known by their acronym, such as “Center for Inquiry”, widely known as “CFI”.

Anyway, what really matters is that you will be consistent in how your name and your logo are used, to reinforce your identity as a stable and competent organization.



About the branding

As you can see below, many IHEU Member Organizations use the “Happy Human” symbol, as well as the IHEU itself. The symbol is used in various forms, colours, shapes, and flavours.

It is up to you whether you prefer to use the “Happy Human” in your logo and branding. Humanists UK holds the trademark for the original Happy Human symbol and freely licenses the original 1965 design for use by bona fide humanist organisations around the world - you can download it from:

humanism.org.uk/humanism/the-happy-human-symbol

Some organizations use a distinct variation on the Happy Human symbol as part of their own logo. These variations on the original should be treated as belonging to that organization only and not copied without permission - organizations need to protect the boundary between their work/identity and that of other humanist

organisations, independent groups or individual humanists. This can be very important in company and charity law.

Below you can find the slightly re-designed, curved version of the Happy Human that the Norwegian Humanist Association offered the world in 2005, used also by the IHEU - you can download it from:

humanism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/modern.jpg



Logo guidelines

Once you decide which logo to adopt, it is useful to write down the guidelines for using it consistently, so that everyone inside and outside your organization will use in the right way in all different possible situations.

If you want to have an idea of how a brand guide should be structured have a look at the one of the Humanist Society Scotland, downloadable here:

iheu.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/HSS-BrandGuidelines.pdf

As you can see, a brand guide should include precise indications on at least:

- format of the logo file (JPG, JPEG, PNG, EPS, etc.)
- logo size and allowed variations
- colour palette
- list of fonts used in your official communications
- incorrect logo usage (see the example aside).

Colour palette – brand colours

BRAND COLOURS



ACCENT COLOURS



A Guide to
Humanist Society Scotland
Brand and Visual Identity

Incorrect logo usage

Do not attempt to recreate, manipulate or alter any element of the logo.

It is important not to copy a screen resolution logo (from the website or a Word document, etc.) and paste it into print work. Use the appropriate logo from the original master file. See 'Choosing the Right File' on page 1.

1. Do not change the typeface.
2. Do not change the illustration element.
3. Do not add graphic elements to the logo.
4. Do not change the colours of the logo.
5. No part of the logo may be distorted, redrawn, tilted or redesigned.
6. Do not place the logo onto a coloured without sufficient contrast or busy background.



Foundation



The foundation of your organization is an important moment, both for its symbolic meaning and for the publicity your organization can receive from such an event. Once you have defined and agreed with your members all the above-mentioned points, you are ready to organize an official event that will formally signal the birth of your organization.

Tell a story

This foundation event can be structured in any possible formal or informal way, but we suggest that you can use the event as the first occasion to draw the attention of the public and of the press on your organization.

When trying to achieve public attention, it is important to tell a story. You need a good and inspiring story that demonstrates in the clearest and most convincing way:

- what your organization wants to do, and why it is necessary;
- how you are going to achieve your goals;
- why you need the help and the contribution of supporters.



You may be able to include some numbers, for example if there is a good estimate of the non-religious population in your country. But don't get into much detail in a press release!

On the contrary, strive to create an emotional story that compels people to join your organization or to support it within their capabilities.

Given that at this stage your mission is an aspiration, try to shape your message in the most compelling way possible.

Target your audience

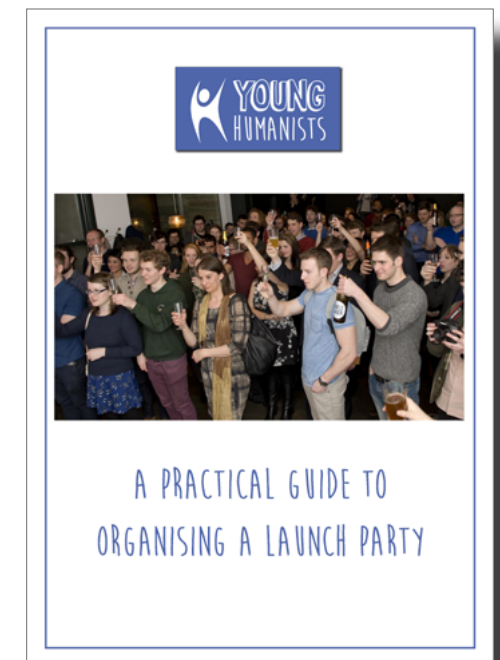
Another key point is “targeting your audience”. Audiences might include: your existing members, your potential members, the wider public, lawmakers you want to lobby, and so on. Depending on the audience you are addressing, you need to adapt the tone and content of your message.

For example, if you know that your organization will work mostly with young people and students, think about a viral way to share your announcement on social networks, organize an event with free snacks

and drinks, games, live concerts, films, etc.

In this regard, a great resource is the Young Humanists “Practical guide to organising a launch party”, downloadable clicking on the image below or the following link:

humanism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/FINAL-Young-Humanists-launch-party-guide.pdf





Registration

Normally, at this stage it is not strictly mandatory to think about the legal registration of your organization. However, in some countries it may be.

Many of our MOs started operating in their countries years before they officially registered as a legally recognised organization. Nonetheless, our advice is to carefully check the laws operating in your own country, looking for the procedure to register as one of the following groups:

- Civil society organizations
- Charities
- Non-governmental organizations (NGOs)

- Non-profit organizations
- Cultural/Social associations

We will come back to this subject more in detail in the second part of the guide, “How to run a Humanist organization”.

Still, it is important that you consider this option already at this stage to ensure that you are complying with any legal obligation - and, moreover, because in some countries there may be advantages to formally registering as an organization, for example certain tax exemptions, or the opportunity to apply for certain grants.

On the right column, a photo from 2013 capturing the day when Siðmennt, the Icelandic Ethical Humanist Association, was officially recognized by the Icelandic Government as the first secular life stance organization in Iceland.

This was just the final step of a long process started in the winter 1988-1989, when a small group organized the first civil confirmation in Iceland.

One year later, in February 1990, that same group officially founded what we now call Siðmennt.



Click on the photo
and the logo for links

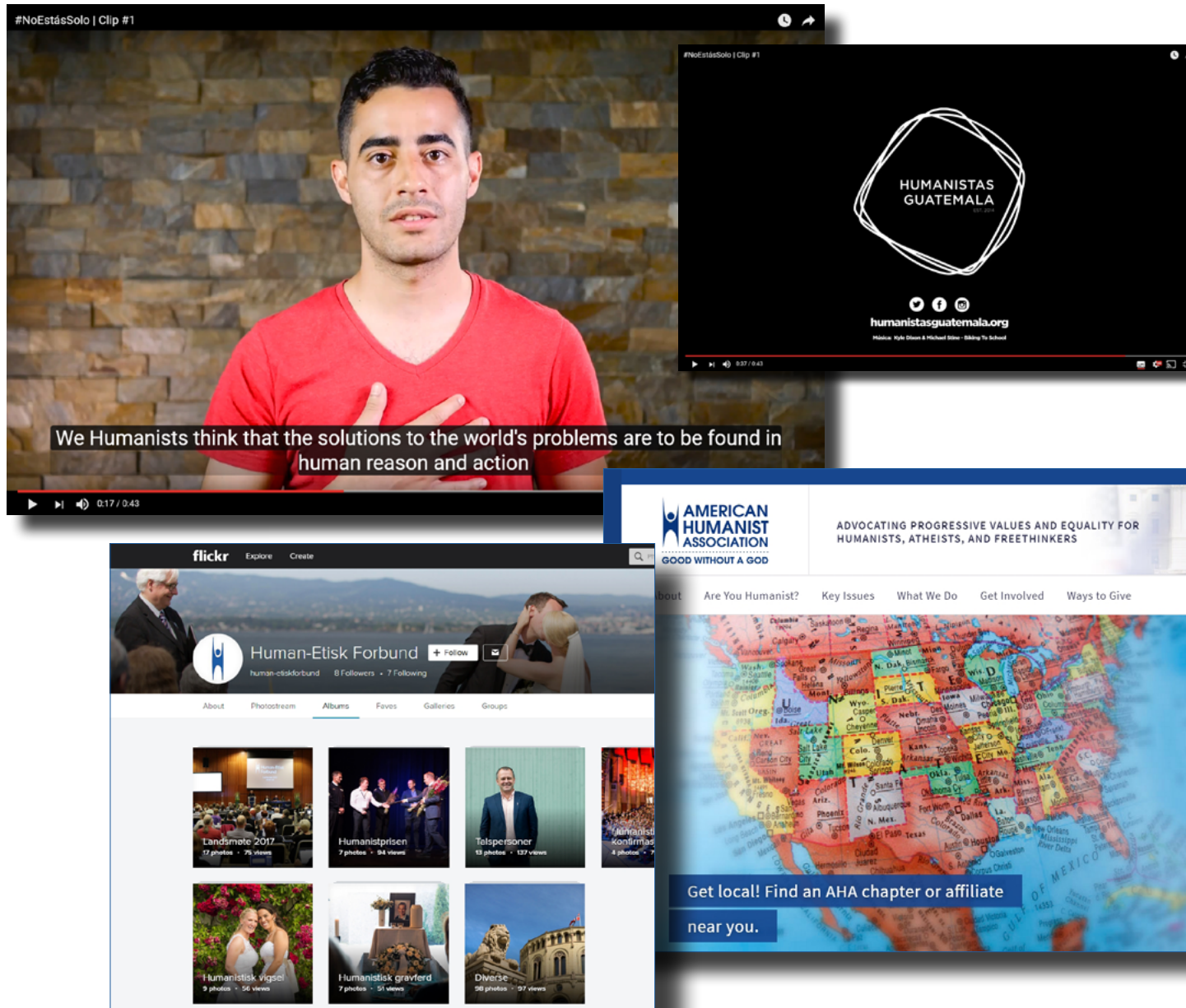




Click on images and
videos for links



Online and social media presence



In the digital era, your online and social media presence is one of the most important aspects of your branding and operations that any new Humanist organization must consider.

The web and social media presence of an organization is so important that we decided to create a whole guide on “How to run a Humanist website and Facebook page”, which will be delivered as the last section of this 4-section guide.

Your new business card

All details and tips will be included in that section, but for the moment it is crucial that you understand how strategically important it is to create and to keep updated your website and your social media profile. In fact, your presence online defines the reputation of your organization.

It is a business card, a showcase of your work, values and goals, a

platform for communicating with potential supporters, and for them to communicate with you.

At this stage you have to carefully define who will be responsible for the administration of the website and of the Facebook page of your organization.

About Facebook



Of course you can decide to use other social platforms, but at the moment Facebook is usually the most appropriate forum in widest use for any kind of social organization.

Click on the logo or the link to know how to set up a Facebook page:

[Facebook.com/business/learn/setup-facebook-page](https://facebook.com/business/learn/setup-facebook-page)



Basic tips for media reputation

Consistency

Define with accuracy the communication line you want to adopt and stick to it as much as possible.

Reliability

You should aim to be known as reliable, so be sure to check your stories and sources before posting anything - you absolutely want to avoid to be known as “fake news”!

Image consolidation

Be consistent in your communication style so that your followers can trust you, relate to you, and know the underlying values that you represent.

Consolidating the image and the identity of your organization you will secure the loyalty of the visitors of your website and of the followers of your page, who may then decide to become individual supporters of your organization.

Above you can see the Facebook cover photo used by UAAR for its recruitment campaign back in 2015 and, below it, an image shared in occasion of UAAR's participation to the 2017 Gay Pride in Bologna.

Notice that the main writing of the cover photo is at the top of the framework so that it won't be covered by the profile picture once uploaded on the page.

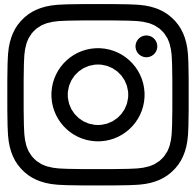
For this kind of tips, please have a look at the official Facebook engagement guide:

facebook.com/business/ads-guide/engagement

Our Member Organizations online

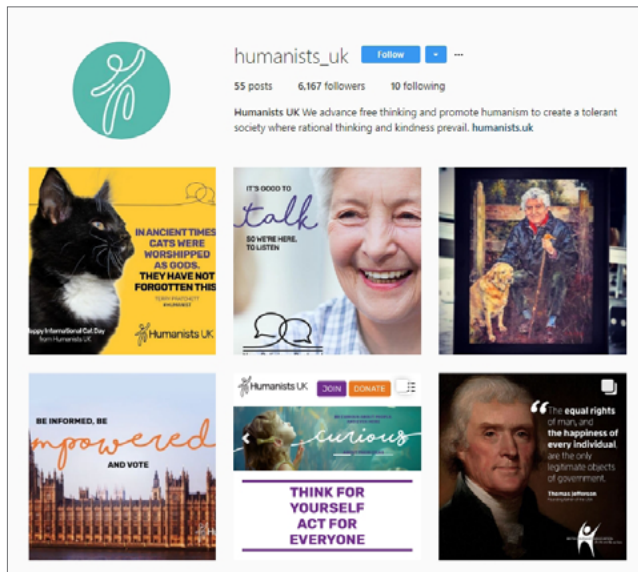
As already announced, we will come back to this specific subject more into details in the fourth part of the guide.

Still, here is a short preview of how and why our Member Organizations are using all the different social networks - click on all pics for links.



Instagram

is the perfect platform for sharing high quality photos and images



YouTube

remains the best platform for uploading and sharing long HD videos



Twitter

is ideal for sharing news and updates from live events



Meetup

is used by many local groups worldwide, especially in big cities



Contacts and info



Guide contents & layout:
Giovanni Gaetani

On the right side of the page you can see a map of IHEU presence worldwide, updated to August 2017 - click on it to see the list of our 140 Member Organizations.

Below the map, you can find all links to our website and social networks profiles - you can click on each icon to be redirected to them.

For any enquiry related to this guide or to simply have more information on the IHEU, you can write us at

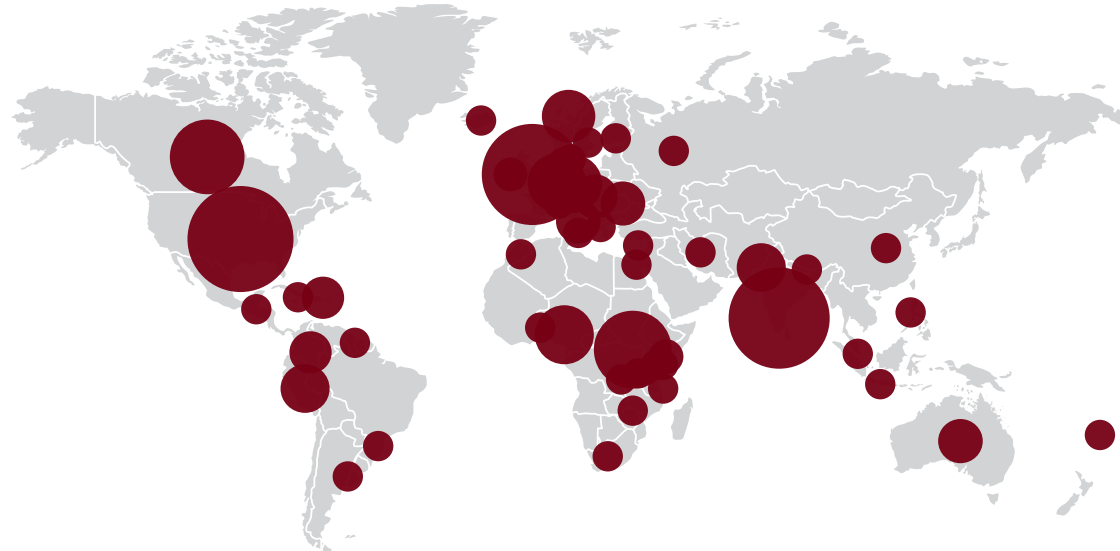
office@iheu.org

If you already part of an organization and you want to let it join our international humanist family, you can apply here:

iheu.org/membership/join

If you want to become an individual supporter of the IHEU you can do it following this link:

iheu.org/support/join



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