INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF
HEALTH INFORMATION MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATIONS (IFHIMA)

Guidelines for Establishing a New National Association

These guidelines have been produced by IFHIMA (formerly IFHRO) to help those countries without a national health information management/health records association to establish a democratic and financially sound organization which is accountable to its members.

i. The association will require a name.

ii. The association’s goals and objectives should be clearly identified. It would be prudent to check if national legislation requires the organization to be ‘incorporated’ or if there are other legal requirements for establishing an association and follow available guidance to achieve this if appropriate.

iii. The association will require a managing body (an executive board or committee) see Annex A and a constitution by which the organization will be governed. The managing body will be responsible for the following:

- Managing the organization’s finances (through the financial officer or director);
- Appointing committees (e.g. education committee, editorial committee etc);
- Constituting local branches of the organization and dissolving them when appropriate;
- Appointing members as delegates or representatives of the organization;
- Establishing an Examination Board, appointing examiners and making arrangements for the award of the organization's qualifications if appropriate.

iv. Membership of the managing body usually comprises the following officers or directors who will serve for a pre-determined period (usually between one and three years). There are different models for the managing body (see Annex A) and national associations should use the structure and terminology for the managing body with which they are most comfortable. Officers will take up office on the date of Annual General Meetings of the association. It is advisable to ensure that changes of officers are staggered to ensure that the entire board or committee does not change at the same time. This will ensure stability of the organization. A quorum for meetings should be 60% of members of the managing body.

v. The officers serving on the managing body should be elected by the membership once the association is established but they may be appointed in the first instance for a pre-determined (time-limited) term of office. These officers will be eligible for election at the end of their appointed term of office.
Nominations for the posts should be sought from the membership and in the event of more than one nomination for a post a ballot of members will need to be held. The National IFHIMA Director should be appointed rather than elected as their term of office is aligned to IFHIMA’s triennial General Assembly rather than the dates of election as is the case for other members of the managing body. IFHIMA’s constitution makes provision for a Deputy IFHIMA Director who should also be appointed if the association chooses to establish this post.

vi. A constitution will need to be drawn up and adopted at a general meeting (see vii below). The constitution should cover the following areas as a minimum:

- The name of the association, it’s goals and objectives;
- Categories of membership and the associated criteria for each category and how the membership may be ended by the member or the association;
- Subscriptions;
- Terms of reference for the managing body (i.e. executive board or committee);
- Terms of office of national and local (branch) officers;
- The rules and procedures for the Annual General Meeting including a quorum for the meeting;
- The requirements for local branches;
- Dissolution of the association;
- The regulations governing changes to the constitution itself.

vii. The organization should hold a general meeting annually (the Annual General Meeting), which should be quorate. At this meeting the audited accounts for the organization should be presented. This meeting will also ratify the appointment of financial auditors and the election of officers for the forthcoming year and approve any changes to the constitution. Minutes of the meeting should be taken contemporaneously and sent out to members or published in the association’s journal in advance of the next scheduled AGM when they will be proposed and accepted as a true and accurate record. The Chairman should sign the minutes to confirm acceptance and they should then be filed in the minute book.

viii. Other general meetings (e.g. Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM), which should also be quorate - to deal with urgent business or a new situation may be held by decision of the managing body or by written request by a predetermined number of voting members (which should be written into the constitution) to the Chief Executive/Secretary who will have a deadline for arranging the meeting (as defined in the constitution).

ix. The new executive board or committee will need to agree categories of membership and the membership subscriptions for each of the categories. Subscriptions will need to be pitched at a level of affordability for potential members but one that covers the actual cost of membership (e.g. costs of badges, costs of a journal if one is to be produced, costs of meetings of the executive board/committee and other committees). Subscription rates should be reviewed annually to ensure that they continue to cover costs.

x. A bank account will need to be opened and a chequebook obtained. Two members of the managing body, usually the financial officer and the Chief Executive/Secretary should sign cheques. This, together with annual auditing of the organization’s accounts by a suitably qualified professional, will help to ensure financial probity of the organization.
xi. The Director of Education/Education Officer may wish to convene an education committee to work on educational issues such as examinations, certification, training programmes, study material etc. If the association decides to offer professional examinations an Examination Board will need to be established to oversee them and to provide assurance of the integrity of the examination process.

xii. The Executive Committee/Executive Board may wish to appoint an Editor if a journal is to be produced either as a web-based publication or in traditional paper format. This Editor may, in turn, wish to convene a small Editorial Committee or Board to assist.

xiii. If the association plans to have a website then there should be an appointed Webmaster with designated responsibility to manage and maintain the website.

xiv. Where local branches are to be established, dependent on the size of the country, there should be a minimum of two elected branch officers covering the secretarial and financial areas together with a Chairman to form the branch committee. Branch members should elect all branch officers.

xv. Most national associations hold an annual educational conference or seminars and a small committee of members should be formed to organize the conference. It is recommended that organising committees start their work well in advance to get the most appropriate speakers and secure a good venue. Sponsorship helps to keep the costs low for delegates and profits from these events can be used to further develop the association.

xvi. Suppliers of Health Information Management/ Health Records Services and products may be willing to provide financial sponsorship in return for acknowledgement of their sponsorship. Associations should be clear about the difference between “sponsorship” and “endorsement” of products. Sponsorship need not be financial e.g. provision of conference folders.

xvii. National Membership of IFHIMA is reserved for one national organization in each country which is representative of the national activities within the field of health information management/health records. The purposes of the organization must be compatible with those of IFHIMA. Only representatives of national member associations (National IFHIMA Directors), whose annual member dues are fully paid are entitled to vote at the triennial General Assembly of the Federation. The world is getting smaller every day and health information management (HIM) no longer has national boundaries. Joining IFHIMA as a “national” member makes an association part of an exciting global network of countries devoted to improving health care through health information.

xviii. If further help or support is needed please contact IFHIMA. Contact details for the Executive Board can be found at http://www.ifhima.org/executive.aspx

Please also visit the IFHIMA website at http://www.ifhima.org

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The assistance of Carol A. Lewis, USA, in the update of these guidelines is gratefully acknowledged.
THE MANAGING BODY OF THE ASSOCIATION

Here are two models for the structure of a national association but there are more. These are just two options and national associations are encouraged to use a structure and terminology for the managing body of their organization with which they are comfortable.

As the organization matures; growing in size and complexity and becoming financially more secure and stable it may be judged to be appropriate by the managing body that some of the roles in the models should held by staff in paid positions.

**Model 1**
- President/Chair
- President/Chair Elect
- Past President
- Chief Executive Officer
- Chief Financial Officer
- Director of Education
- National IFHIMA Director (this officer will usually serve a three year term of office to coincide with the three yearly meetings of the General Assembly of IFHIMA).

**Model 2**
- Chairman;
- Chairman Elect (who will serve for a pre-determined period before taking office usually one year);
- Past Chairman (who will serve for a pre-determined period before leaving office usually one year);
- Chief Executive or Secretary or Business Manager;
- Director of Finance or Treasurer;
- Director of Education or Education Officer (if education is one of the association’s stated objectives);
- National IFHIMA Director if the association is to become a member of IFHIMA (this officer will usually serve a three year term of office to coincide with the triennial meetings of the IFHIMA General Assembly).

If an association decides to adopt Model 2 for the structure of its managing body it may wish to appoint a non-executive President for a pre-determined period of office (suggested – 1 to 3 years). The term of office will need to be specified together with the rules regarding eligibility for re-election (suggested - may be eligible for re-election for no more than three consecutive terms of office). A President who has a high profile and is well-known in-country or internationally can provide practical help and support and assist a new association to raise its profile both nationally and internationally. New associations may wish to wait until they are more mature before electing a non-executive President.

The National IFHIMA Director should be appointed rather than elected as their term of office is aligned to IFHIMA’s triennial General Assembly rather than the dates of election as is the case for other members of the managing body. IFHIMA’s constitution makes provision for a Deputy IFHIMA Director who should also be appointed if the association chooses to establish this post.