



How to set up an Organisation of Women in Sciences, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM)

This manual is provided by the International Network of Women Engineers and Scientists (INWES). It details the procedure to set up an organisation for women working in Science, Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) in any country.

This manual may be useful to women of any of the STEM disciplines working in academia, industry or any other professional environment.



1. OBJECTIVES FOR AN ORGANISATION OF WOMEN IN STEM

The main reasons to create an organisation of women in STEM are described, along with examples of activities and programs that may be usefully developed in such an organisation.

Encourage women and girls to pursue STEM studies, and reduce drop-out rates:

- be enthusiastic role models for girls in schools; describe work and potential careers
- organise and/or participate in hands-on activities in schools (science and engineering)
- present STEM careers to parents and teachers
- support and mentor girls and young women in STEM studies
- suggest strategies to educational authorities to encourage girls to consider STEM careers and studies

Encourage participation and promotion of women in STEM disciplines in their professional career

- help young women in job search, and awareness of potential jobs and careers
- mentor young women starting their career, in order to retain them in STEM activities
- encourage an increased representation of women in key positions, opportunities in advancement and equality at professional level in companies and academia
- promote a gender monitoring system to monitor progress in women position at professional level
- encourage authorities to enforce policies strengthening the position of women in STEM careers
- set up networks as a means to share experiences and open-up new opportunities



Represent women in one or more STEM disciplines at national and international level

- attend and organise conferences enhancing the gender dimension in STEM disciplines
- set up website, forum and appropriate communication means to become visible
- advocacy to increase the presence of women in STEM in decision-making positions, in professional organisations and public fora
- profile positive experiences of women in STEM in order to help change the public's perception about women and technology and science



2. VARIOUS STRUCTURES, ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

Formal structure (constituted association with by-laws, policies and mailing address):

Advantages

- Brings authority and credibility
- Unites voices for a higher impact on government/organisations policies
- Mandates members to speak with a stronger voice
- Combines volunteer and financial resources
- Enables members to develop activities and contacts on a larger scale
- Has a definite contact point
- Facilitates communication and recognition
- Enhances visibility
- Democratic representation/elected officers with legitimate mandates; operations are transparent to membership
- Authorizes all activities, prevents conflicts of interest
- Ensures continuity of activities along with members' movements
- Official finances are clear and transparent, which enables fund development, soliciting of donations (corporations usually only donate to an incorporated not-for-profit association) and financial support



Drawbacks/limitations

- can be expensive to set up
- can be heavy to maintain
- may need staff to service

Informal network (website, informal meetings and/or newsletters)

Advantages

- Easy and cheap to be run by several volunteers
- Flexible, can easily change to suit circumstances
- No budget, no financial report to be presented to member

Drawbacks/limitations

- No recognition outside; very little authority or credibility
- No clear point of contact
- Difficult to see how it is operating
- Very difficult to get funds from companies/authorities or funds from members



3. STEP BY STEP INSTRUCTIONS FOR SETTING UP AN ORGANISATION OF WOMEN IN STEM

The exact structure of an association and documents necessary to legally register it may differ from one country to the other. The purpose of the following information is to help identify the various steps and sequence to create an association based on the experience of INWES members.

INWES may help you in several of these steps and thus significant benefits may be received in joining INWES as an individual even before your organisation is created. If needed, INWES may help you to find sister associations in other countries, and may be able to give small grants to help with initial costs.

Step by step instructions

Although every set up will be different, you may go through the following steps

1. Identify several women engineers/scientists that have similar interests
2. Set initial meetings to determine level of interest and willingness to commit time and resources
3. Contact technical or women's organizations to find out how they were started
4. Contact other technical organizations to find out if they have women's sections, or if they would support you
5. Define basic information needed: mission, goals and proposed activities. Define the field and framework of the future organisation (type of members, geographical area covered – regional, national or international)
6. Obtain or assemble list of women engineers/scientists and individuals who would support you



7. Identify and contact high profile persons potentially interested in your organisation; review with them the possibility for effective support in starting your organisation and help make it visible.
8. Send out information material and conduct survey of women to determine interests
9. Obtain information on the local legal process to set up an association or corporation, if relevant.
10. Hold organizing conference or meeting to start the association; establish the appropriate structure, determine the essential details for the organisation (name, address, principles for by-laws and policies)
11. Prepare by-laws, policies, and documents necessary to register the association; apply to the authorities to have the association officially registered
(Examples of such documents are available at INWES; but they shall have to be written according to the legal requirements of the country.)
12. Provide a press release to the local, regional and national media
13. Set up website, design fact sheets, stationary and other documentation
(Examples are available through INWES.)
14. Hold joint meetings with other women's or technical organizations
15. Collaborate with schools and government agencies to build on existing programmes.
16. Join INWES.



Application for Grant from INWES

A small grant, usually up to a value of \$250, may be available for those who wish to start an organisation. For consideration, an applicant set out as many details about the proposed Association as possible. This should include

- purpose and aims
- the type of people it wishes to attract
- support from local people/organisations
- budget for starting the Association
- the amount of money requested from INWES along with the reasons it is needed
- any other supporting information.

These details should be submitted to the VP (Programmes), who will make a recommendation to the Executive on whether to support the application.