



AMERICAN
KENNEL CLUB®

Suggestions for Organizing a State Federation of Dog Clubs

Canine legislation issues are increasingly impacting dog ownership. It is the duty of all dog owning citizens to actively participate and assist in local, state, and national legislation concerning dogs and dog owners. Promoting the general welfare of dogs and firmly supporting the right to own dogs are priorities that must be addressed. As an expert in responsible dog ownership, your assistance would be valuable to the lawmakers you have elected. Government "of the people, by the people, and for the people" is of no use if the people do not speak up! If not you, who will be the voice for those who can not speak for themselves? For centuries, dogs have fulfilled the role of man's best friend. **Now**, it is time for man to return the favor.

There are several advantages to coordinating your efforts as a single, cohesive unit:

➤ ***Distribution of the work-load***

No one should have to do all the work to ensure that all responsible dog owners can continue to enjoy their companions and their participation in the sport of purebred dogs. All interested parties should be willing to pitch in!

➤ ***Increase your success***

A single dog owner supporting good legislation does make a difference; however, an organization makes a bigger impact.

➤ ***Teamwork and Efficiency***

Efficiency is gained when an organization of people with a similar interest work toward a shared goal. This allows you to utilize the talents of others and enables you to respond immediately to any situation.

➤ ***The Power of Numbers***

Forming an organization will greatly increase your chances of having volunteers who can focus on areas such as lobbying, education, networking, research, public relations, and newsletter correspondence.

A federation comprised of a large membership has a considerable amount of power in influencing local, state, and federal legislation.

➤ ***Eliminates duplication of efforts***

Rather than several individuals or clubs struggling independently, a federation can approach an issue from a consolidated front. This will conserve time, energy, and financial resources.

➤ ***How Do You Start?***

- A core group of individuals must take the initiative; such a group could be a club or a cluster of clubs. It is essential to form a steering committee to set the framework.

- Contact other state federations to gain ideas. Some federations have loosely knit organizations and others have very formal structures; decide which structure would best fit your needs. A contact list is included in this packet.
- Consider finances. You will need to consult with local experts such as attorneys and accountants in order to pay for the costs of contacting potential members, to incorporate, and to reimburse other specific costs to organize a state federation.
- Arrangements need to be made for postage, photocopying, and phone bills. Club members or friends with resources, with access to copying machines, could be asked to help. You may get several kennel clubs to make donations to the federation to pay for the costs of set-up and incorporation. If you cannot factor in this financial need, wait until your core group is able to do so.
- Beginning the process of informing clubs of your intentions and then not being able to follow through will damage your credibility and demoralize everyone who initially supported you. If you are given money to cover your start-up expenses, you will be expected to account for its use. Keep receipts or bills to show your benefactors where their donations went. By proving that you spent their money wisely, you will make sure their faith in your fiscal responsibility is intact from the start.

➤ ***Once you have some working capital and have established a steering committee:***

- Solicit the state dog fancy, clubs and individual members, for their opinions.
- Do clubs have any suggestions for the main focus or for membership of a state group? Do clubs have active Public Education Coordinators? Would they be interested in being part of a state group? Do clubs in your state have a legislative chair or committee? Do they have any current position statements addressing any type of legislation?
- Arrange for a meeting of interested representatives of the dog fancy. Contact the AKC for lists of AKC-affiliated clubs in your state including: show and obedience clubs, field trials and hunting tests clubs, herding events clubs, and lure coursing clubs.
- Arranging this meeting requires more start-up capital: postage, copying of invitations and informational handouts, and long-distance calls to confirm acceptances or give directions. You might also arrange for food and a rented meeting site if the numbers grow too large for a restaurant or a home.

➤ ***Decisions you must make:***

- What will be the goals of the organization and its main focus? Think about the mission statement of the organization. Draft a mission statement that details the beliefs, goals, and intent of your organization. A mission statement should be clear and direct; however, the rhetoric should be broad enough to encompass the needs and goals of your organization.
- How will you incorporate? We **strongly** suggest that you consult a local attorney who can advise you on such issues as incorporation, constitution and bylaw language, and PAC status or tax-exempt status. It is important to get this framework and direction **before** you start. Certain government bodies are quite particular about the kind of language that must be in your articles of incorporation.

- What will your constitution and bylaws say? Enclosed are three samples of federation constitutions and bylaws for your reference. These samples are for informational purposes and are intended to provide you with a starting point only. These samples should **not** be copied without carefully considering the advantages and the disadvantages. Please keep in mind that the constitution and bylaws which may be appropriate for an all-breed kennel club or a specialty club may *not* be appropriate for a federation of clubs or individuals. We **strongly** suggest that you consult a local attorney who is familiar with incorporations in your state.
- Federations may be composed of individuals; incorporated dog clubs in the state (although with this restriction, you may lose some licensed clubs which are associations); AKC sanctioned, licensed and member clubs; all dog-related clubs in the state; or animal-related groups (this broadens the focus to all species - not just *canis familiaris*). Who can be members, and who will comprise your membership groups? There are advantages and disadvantages to the different types of membership.
- You are more likely to obtain unity of opinion if membership is limited to dog clubs. However, you will have greater strength and can affect more legislation if your members include all animal-related groups. Check with other federations and see what they like and dislike about their structure.
- What kind of membership fees will be levied? How will they be levied? If your group is composed of dog clubs, will the all-breed clubs pay more than specialty clubs? Will the membership fee be based on number of members?
- What will your organization be called and how will it be structured. Will the organization be run by a board of directors? Whatever the structure, you need to give a smaller group of people the ability to act on behalf of the federation. Legislative issues happen quickly. It is oftentimes not practical to convene the entire membership body to vote on a legislative issue.
- Will you elect officers, if so, how will the officers and board be elected/appointed? Will your organization have one or more committees?
- What kind of communications system will be set up to keep the membership involved? Monthly newsletters, internet websites, or mailing groups are all effective informative tools. Enclosed are two sample newsletters from existing federations.
- Will you have regular meetings; if so, monthly, quarterly, annually? Will the board or officers convene more frequently than the general membership?

➤ ***Stick with what works!***

Keep in mind that this will be an organization to help the dog fancy deal with legislation in *your* state. What works in one state may not work in another. You can use the ideas from other federations and adapt them to your particular needs. If it works in your state, then do not worry if it is not the same as somewhere else.

Clearly, this is a lot of ground to cover. But it is just the beginning. Do not be discouraged if you do not get any further than defining the goals of the organization at the first meeting.

➤ ***After establishing a general framework, determine:***

- Whether you will need to register as a formal lobbying organization.
- What other state regulations may apply to you as an organization.

- Whether you must file a charitable contributions return for fund-raising projects.
- What will your tax status be and what kind of tax returns must you file or if you are exempt from filing under a specified gross amount.
- If you will register your name.
- What bank will you use?

➤ ***You may want to establish position statements***

It is a good idea to have some positions decided before you are faced with potential legislation. While some issues are fairly straightforward, not all legislation is easy to pin down as good or bad. Sometimes it is difficult to agree on the details. For example, few people would disagree that the welfare of their dogs is extremely important. But how do you define it?

➤ ***Typical position statements:***

- Consumer protection laws
- Breeding regulation
- Cruelty laws
- Dangerous dog laws (Breed Specific Legislation)

Enclosed are summaries of the AKC position statements. These statements may be a good starting point for your discussion.

➤ ***Take responsibility for the well-being of purebreds***

The dog fancy in your state will ultimately live with whatever legislation is passed, good or bad. The important thing to keep in mind is that your decisions should reflect the majority views of your organization's membership and should benefit responsible dog ownership and participation in the sport of purebred dogs.

➤ ***Research all current state laws that apply to dogs (and other animals)***

You will not be recognized as an expert unless you know the existing laws in your state. Analyze current state law. Who is in charge of administering the law? What are the regulations?

If there are portions of the current law you do not like, establish a goal to change those laws.

➤ ***Research your state legislature***

Determine which committees and subcommittees have jurisdictions over legislation concerning dogs. Take some time to learn the possible routes a dog bill could take.

In many states, the Agriculture Committee will review dog legislation; however, if the bill involves crimes it may go first to the Public Safety or Judiciary Committee.

If the bill involves local government, it may go to a committee that deals with local issues. If the bill concerns hunting, it may go to a Natural Resources Committee.

➤ ***Learn how to lobby***

AKC is an important resource for informative materials; this packet contains a materials order form. Information regarding the legislative process can be requested from your state capitol.

➤ ***You are now ready to begin lobbying***

- Send a letter introducing and explaining the purpose of your organization to all members of the committee that deal with animal issues. If a mailing list for information is routinely sent out about bills on a certain subject, you may want to ask if you can be placed on the "animal" list.
- Make an appointment with the chair or vice chair of the committee, and take a small delegation of your organization to make a personal introductory visit. A courtesy call such as this is likely to be five or ten minutes in length at the most, but it will let the committee know your organization exists.

➤ ***Cultivate relationships with legislative aides***

If you cannot see an actual committee member, do not feel slighted. Make the appointment with the committee member's staff. Legislative aides are great contacts. The aides will remember your interest and can recommend your organization to the committee member.

➤ ***Designate a small committee or spokesperson***

Your organization's position often times will need to be presented in a formal way either to a legislative committee or at a press conference. Your spokesperson should be knowledgeable about the subject and know your organization's views. He or she should be articulate, level-headed, and well-groomed.

You may want to develop several spokespersons to represent your group on local issues. Everyone who is authorized to speak on your organizations behalf should be well-versed on the issues and viewpoints of the organization. As representatives of your federation, they should express the policies of the federation, not their own personal opinions or assessments.

Your federation should consider a policy or a conflict of interest statement prohibiting officers or representatives from advocating positions in opposition to the positions of the federation.

➤ ***Handling local governments***

You may want to have several people around the state who are well-versed in various types of issues that come up — running-at-large laws, nuisance ordinances, license fees, kennel regulations. Ask your members to investigate the local ordinances pertaining to dogs.

➤ ***Establish a communications system***

- The membership needs to be kept informed of what the federation is doing, and they need to have an active role in deciding those issues. Although consulting a large membership every time an important topic arises may seem to be cumbersome, it is necessary unless well-established policies are in place which keep the members and officers/board members informed and working as an unified team.
- If the members perceive that those in charge are not acting in their best interests, or not respecting their wishes as dues-paying supporters, they will become disgruntled and drop out. Unless your members are involved in the decision-making process and informed of changes and updates, they may act on their own. Disenfranchised members may also become confused about what the federation is doing and may unintentionally say or do something contrary to the federation's efforts.

- An organization representing conflicting viewpoints will be viewed as ineffective to most legislators. Spokesmen must always articulate the organization's positions clearly. If not, your organization could lose a legislator's support and confidence forever.
- The goal of your organization should be to help responsible dog owners maintain their right to own and enjoy the sport of purebred dogs.

➤ ***Understand your organization's relationship to AKC***

- In your lobbying efforts, you must be able to present yourselves to local and state governments, potential new members, and the media without being misunderstood or misquoted.
- Only AKC officers and employees can be representatives of AKC.
- State and local federations are not AKC members or affiliated clubs under AKC's constitution and bylaws.
- AKC does not endorse one reputable federation in favor of another reputable federation representing the same state.

➤ ***Become a prime force behind dog legislation in your state***

- The AKC originally asked dog clubs to band together for lobbying purposes because we could not do it all. This has not changed.
- Market yourselves as the resident dog experts in your state.
- Legislators will always prefer to serve their constituents.
- Monitor dog legislation issues in your area.
- Actively participate in state legislation issues.

➤ ***Working with the American Kennel Club***

- It is perfectly acceptable to read AKC position statements or letters and qualify them as "AKC's position" to government officials or the media.
- It is also acceptable for federations to state that they work with or assist and receive assistance from the AKC.

➤ ***Share your experiences***

AKC encourages you to work with other federations so that you may benefit from each other's ideas, successes, and failures. We would be happy to include your stories in our monthly newsletter, "Taking Command".

For additional assistance and information, please contact:

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We look forward to working with you!