

A few tips on starting a voluntary bar association . . .

"Voluntary" Bars are private organizations and are not chapters, affiliates or sub-units of The Florida Bar. They are independent organizations.

Local bar associations that desire to establish and sponsor a lawyer referral services must seek approval of The Florida Bar (Ch 8, Rules Regulating The Florida Bar). Otherwise, the Rules Regulating The Florida Bar contain no other significant references to "local" or "voluntary" bar associations that would imply any sort of state bar control over local voluntary bar groups.

If you are thinking about starting an association, the first step is to have a core group of leaders with the same mission in mind. These people can serve as an organizing committee and will likely become your first officers and board members. Developing a mission statement will also help define your potential membership.

The next steps would be to choose an organizational structure (whether or not you want to incorporate). Incorporated associations must observe organizational requirements set up by state law -- keeping minutes, holding an annual meeting, reporting guidelines, etc. The Florida Department of State Division of Corporations has registration and filing information available online at <http://www.sunbiz.org/index.html>.

The next step would be to apply for an exempt tax status with the IRS. The IRS will also provide forms to apply for tax exempt status. Generally, associations fall into one of two categories: business trade groups are exempt under 501(c) 6 of the code and specific scientific or educational groups are exempt under Section 501(c)3. Because (c)3's are considered charities, they are expected to abstain from political action and their lobbying activities are severely limited.

The birth of a new organization can be extremely rewarding. Perhaps the resources available to voluntary bar groups on our [Voluntary Bar Center](#) web page can be of some help.

Please don't forget to [register your Bar with The Florida Bar](#) so we can include your President in our directory and your bar can be kept informed of items of interest to the organized voluntary bar community.

Best of luck to you in this endeavor.