

**A Practical Guide on
How to Start an AVA Club**



Fun, Fitness, Friendship

PART I: AMERICAN VOLKSSPORT ASSOCIATION

1. AMERICAN VOLKSSPORT ASSOCIATION (AVA).

Formed in the USA's bicentennial year, 1976, the American Volkssport Association (AVA) is an organized group of non-profit clubs across America that promotes, organizes and conducts physical activity events to promote a healthy lifestyle. The most popular of these events feature walking. Other events include cycling, swimming, cross-country skiing, snow shoeing and skating.

Member clubs of the American Volkssport Association offer over 2800 walking events and over 200 other event venues throughout the year in communities across the United States. These events are non-competitive and open to everyone of all ages. Participants complete the event at their own pace. Anyone may participate for either a low-cost participation fee, or in many cases free of charge, depending upon the sponsoring club. All participants must register for the Event.

2. AVA GOALS AND OBJECTIVES.

AVA is the advocate for promotion and organization of walking and other non-competitive sporting events that encourage physical fitness, fun and friendship for people of all ages and abilities. Our goal is to promote public health through participation in these non-competitive sport activities. We value quality family-oriented events.

PART II: BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON FORMING AN AVA CLUB

1. ELIGIBILITY.

Any interested group may form an AVA club. While most AVA clubs are formed for the purpose of promoting a healthy lifestyle through non-competitive sport, a number of clubs have other purposes, such as civic or fraternal organizations, schools, travel organizations, Chambers of Commerce, Parks Departments or sports/recreation/fitness facilities. Each club, however, must be a non-profit organization, approved and recognized by both the US Federal Government and by the US State in which they are formed.

2. AVA - FEES AND COSTS.

A. Charter Fee. To join AVA, an organization must pay a one-time AVA Charter fee of \$50.

B. Annual AVA Membership Fee. Each AVA club pays Annual Membership Fees. Upon application to become an AVA club, the first year's annual fees of \$50 are pro-rated (depending on the date of the application to join AVA) as follows: Jul-

Sep \$50; Oct-Dec \$37.50; Jan-Mar \$25; Apr-Jun \$12.50. Thereafter the annual dues are billed to the club and are due in June of each year.

C. Event Fees. Each AVA club pays a sanction fee to hold an event, and pays a portion of the fees collected from participants (a small fee, not to exceed \$3). When a club also has a state organization, a small portion of the collected fees may go to the state organization, as well.

D. Event Insurance. AVA provides liability insurance coverage for each event. The cost of this insurance is included in the sanction fee.

E. Event Information. For a full description of events and event requirements, consult AVA HQ. Contact information is below:

Mailing address: American Volkssport Association
1001 Pat Booker Rd #101
Universal City, TX 78148

Email: avahq@ava.org
Website: www.ava.org
Telephone: (210) 659-2112
FAX: (210) 659-1212

F. Club Membership Dues. Clubs may assess membership dues to help defray costs. Membership dues are set by each club and may be charged by individual or by family. Five to ten dollars per year, per person is a common amount.

3. APPROVAL AS A NON-PROFIT CORPORATION.

Your club must be approved at federal and state level as a non-profit corporation unless your club is already part of a government entity, such as a Park and Recreation Department, a school or a chapter of an existing charitable organization, such as Kiwanis, Lions, Elks, etc. If a club is already part of a government entity or a charitable organization, you probably already have approval from IRS and your state. Consult your organization to obtain a copy of their approval. If your club is not part of another entity, more detailed instructions for federal and state approval are in PART III below.

PART III: STEPS & TIMELINE TO FORMING AN AVA CLUB

1. PREPARATION.

A. Prepare in Advance. Operating any non-profit club requires dedication and commitment. Certainly the potential club must be willing to support and promote the goals and purposes of AVA. Therefore, AVA suggests that before submitting an application to AVA, those interested in forming a club consult with

AVA National Headquarters and other clubs in their area. Advance preparation is the key to forming a successful club.

B. Resources and Information. Running a walking club and program may be found through consultation with AVA Headquarters, who may suggest regional officers, state associations or local clubs willing to become sponsors or mentor in your effort.

C. Mentors and Sponsors. AVA will help you seek clubs or individuals who are experienced in operating an AVA club. These people can act as your advisors in forming a club. Some may even join your organization as a mentor for the new officers.

2. STEPS TO CREATE THE CLUB.

A. Obtain potential members. Local press releases and word of mouth are invaluable aids to finding interested potential members. Also consider announcement flyers at AVA events held by other clubs.

B. Hold an organizational meeting. Once you have interest in forming a club, hold an organizational meeting to elect officers, select an official name and purpose for your club and prepare Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws. See Attachment 1 for sample Articles of Incorporation and Attachment 2 for sample club bylaws. You should have a President, a Secretary and a Treasurer as a minimum. AVA suggests the following officers.

1). **President:** provides general direction, acts as liaison with outside organizations and looks after the protocol matters.

2). **Vice-President:** assists the president, coordinates all aspects of club events including publicity and replaces the president as necessary.

3). **Secretary:** coordinates receipt and responses to correspondence, and files official club reports.

4). **Treasurer:** receives and disburses funds as well as prepares an annual budget.

5.) **Trail Director/Trailmaster:** handles all trail matters for club events.

C. IRS Approval. Your club must be approved as a 501(c)(3) or 501(c)(4) non-profit corporation (or already approved as part of another recognized non-profit organization. See Part II. 3. above). A 501(c)(3) or 501(c)(4) status is given by the IRS. You must meet certain requirements from the IRS in order to get this status.

1). Refer to the IRS website at www.irs.gov for publication 557 "Tax-Exempt Status for your Organization, published by the IRS. To be recognized by

IRS, a charitable organization's Articles of Incorporation must contain a required purpose clause and dissolution of assets provision. Valuable information on 501(c)(3) qualification is at the IRS. Sample Articles of Incorporation can be found at www.irs.gov. Click the "Charities and Non-profits" link and then the "Life Cycle of a Public Charity" link.

2). Obtain a Federal Employee Identification Number (FEIN) from the US Internal Revenue Service. This number identifies your club federal tax account and can be obtained via internet. Go to www.irs.gov and search the site for FEIN. The process can be done via internet in about five minutes. Be sure to print the form showing your assigned number as you will need it to open a bank account.

D. State Approval. Register with your State Secretary of State for recognition as an incorporated non-profit organization within your state. This approval includes paying a fee and sending a copy of your Articles of Incorporation/bylaws. Most states issue their own identifier numbers that identify your club for all state agencies. This number, sometimes called a Unified Business Identifier (UBI) may also be required by your state when you open the club bank account. For most states, forms are available at the State Secretary of State's website.

E. Open a Club Bank Account. The account should be for a non-profit organization. The bank will ask for a copy of your Federal Employee Identification Number (FEIN) and possibly your State approval as a non-profit organization.

3. APPLY TO AVA FOR MEMBERSHIP.

These are the steps you must follow to gain AVA approval as a member club.

A. Prepare a Cover Letter. This letter should contain a short description of the club and list the person or persons who are the club's main point of contact (POC).

B. Complete the application. The form is shown at www.ava.org. From the website home page, click on Membership; then click on AVA Forms; then click on AVA Form 201 to print a copy of the Application. Enclose the following information as well:

1). list of founding members of the club Executive Committee (names, addresses, phone and fax numbers, e-mail addresses).

2). a copy of the club constitution/bylaws, as approved by club members.

3). proof of an established club bank account (a copy of an approved application for an account or a monthly bank statement is acceptable).

4). your Employer Identification Number (FEIN) from the IRS.

5). a check/money order for: the \$50 Charter fee plus the pro-rated portion of the clubs Annual Membership Fee (See Part II 2.B. for an explanation). Make the check payable to the American Volkssport Association.

C. Submission. Send the cover letter and application forms to your AVA State organization if you are located in California, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Maryland, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas, Virginia or Washington. For all other states, send the cover letter and application forms to your AVA Regional Director. Mailing addresses can be found at www.ava.org (click on Membership, then Executive Council) or by calling AVA Headquarters at (210) 659-2112.

State organizations and Regional Directors will forward your application to AVA Headquarters.

D. Approval by AVA. When AVA approves your application, AVA sends the following:

1). A Charter Certificate issued by the AVA under the President's seal and signature, certifying that your club is a member of the American Volkssport Association and assigning a club identification number to your club.

2). You will receive or have access to on-line publications:

a). the AVA Policy Manual

b). a copy of the current IVV rules

c). a copy of the AVA Bylaws

d). a copy of the Treasurer's Handbook

e). a copy of the Event Handbook

f). a Login ID and Password for entry into AVA's administrative and event sanctioning system via the AVA website. The AVA Policy Manual, the AVA Event Handbook, and online help instructions will help you meet deadlines and requirements for administration and to conduct AVA events.

E. Membership in a State Organization. State organizations exist in California, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Maryland, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas, Virginia and Washington. Once a club becomes a member of AVA, membership in the State Association, if applicable, is automatic. AVA will notify the state organization and they will contact you.

PART IV: ORGANIZING YOUR CLUB

1. PICK A PURPOSE.

Once you have the legalities under control, use the following suggestions to refine and focus your club. Many clubs have a specific purpose such as woodland walks, events focused on families, theme walks such as holidays or seasons, or local history. Consider a general purpose for your club.

2. DEFINE KEY CLUB POSITIONS.

In your initial meetings, identify and seek volunteers for key club positions. While there are many positions you may create, the key positions are:

A. Publicity Coordinator: coordinates publicity for club meetings and events.

B. Membership Coordinator: keeps a roster of all members and assures that each new member is welcomed to the club.

C. Volunteer Coordinator: seeks volunteers to fill the various positions needed to conduct an event.

D. Newsletter Editor: publishes a newsletter, usually monthly, via print and email.

3. PLAN YOUR EVENTS.

It is helpful to have an annual plan for club meetings, events and your social events. You can determine what you want to do by observing other clubs and copying what you like. Here are some tips.

A. Club Meetings. Publicize your meetings by email, newsletter or newspaper announcements. To find a meeting place, consider a local church, library, someone's home, fraternal lodges or community centers. Although some clubs meet annually or semi-annually, AVA recommends 9-12 meetings per year. You may choose to have guest speakers on any topic that interests members and minimize the business portion of the meeting. Strike a balance between formal and informal meetings. Acquire a copy of Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised.

B. Club events. AVA walks are organized community walks, held in all weather, following planned trails, which are safe, scenic and usually circular: usually 10 kilometer (6.2 miles). Optional 5 kilometer (3.1 mile) distances are often available. Consult AVA's Event Handbook (available electronically from www.ava.org) for advice on how to organize, equip and operate an event.

C. Social events. Some clubs have social themes for their club meetings. Ideas like holiday cookie exchanges, guest speakers, ice cream socials or short meetings with fun walks following. Other clubs combine the opportunity for

socializing with their walking events by creating a place at the start/finish for people to sit and talk, selling food and beverages, having a barbeque, prize drawings, etc. Be creative.

4. CONSIDER YOUR PLACE IN THE COMMUNITY.

Your club may decide to do special projects to benefit your community, support local school or charitable project. At the very least, publicize your events within your community. After all, that is where your new members will come from.

5. RAISING FUNDS.

Initial funding for the fees to start a club usually come from individual membership club dues. Collect the first year dues in advance to help pay for the legal set-up costs. Although AVA provides trail marking supplies and event start cards, you will need some equipment for your events, such as tables, chairs, water containers, club banners and signage, etc. There are many ways to raise funds. Some suggestions include:

A. Seek donations from your membership.

B. Seek donations from potential sponsors, local service clubs or other community organizations, banks or local sports/recreations/fitness facilities and or commercial enterprises.

C. Seek assistance from other AVA clubs.

D. Get advice from your State Association, if applicable, and/or your AVA Regional Director.

E. Hold a public fund-raiser.

PART V: OPERATIONS AND HOLDING EVENTS.

1. GUIDANCE FROM AVA.

Once the club is established, guidance and advice is available from AVA on a number of subjects.

A. Events. AVA has an Event Handbook to describe all those nitty-gritty details that turn an average event into a quality event. Assure that your event host and/or Trailmaster has a copy. For guidance and tips, download the AVA Event Handbook from www.ava.org. From the home page, click on Publications.

B. Operating Rules. AVA's Policy Manual provides guidance on all administrative matters. It is also available at www.ava.org.

C. Treasurer's Guide. The AVA Treasurer's Guide gives advice and tips to each club Treasurer. It is designed so that a Treasurer can maintain a manual bookkeeping system instead of using computer software. Available at www.ava.org; click on Publications.

D. AVA Checkpoint. The Checkpoint is AVA's monthly administrative newsletter, sent electronically to all clubs. It provides policy changes, explanations of policy and keeps you up to date on information required to operate your club.

2. OTHER RESOURCES.

Do not forget to use your neighbor clubs, State Organization (if applicable) and your AVA Regional Director as a resource for information and guidance.

3. MOST OF ALL, HAVE FUN.

ATTACHMENT 1

SAMPLE ARTICLES OF INCORPORATION

**SUGGESTED LANGUAGE FOR CORPORATIONS AND ASSOCIATIONS
(PER IRS PUBLICATION 557)**

Articles of Incorporation of _____. The undersigned, a majority of whom are citizens of the United States, desiring to form a Non-Profit Corporation under the Non-Profit Corporation Law of ____, do hereby certify:

First: The name of the Corporation shall be _____.

Second: The place in this state where the principal office of the Corporation is to be located is the City of _____, _____ County, State of _____.

Third: Said Corporation is organized exclusively for charitable, religious, educational, and scientific purposes, including, for such purposes, the making of distributions to organizations that qualify as exempt organizations under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, or the corresponding section of any future federal tax code.

Fourth: The names and addresses of the persons who are the initial trustees of the Corporation are as follows:

Name _____ Address _____

Fifth: No part of the net earnings of the Corporation shall inure to the benefit of, or be distributable to its members, trustees, officers, or other private persons, except that the Corporation shall be authorized and empowered to pay reasonable compensation for services rendered and to make payments and distributions in furtherance of the purposes set forth in Article Third hereof. No substantial part of the activities of the Corporation shall be the carrying on of propaganda, or otherwise attempting to influence legislation, and the Corporation shall not participate in, or intervene in (including the publishing or distribution of statements) any political campaign on behalf of or in opposition to any candidate for public office. Notwithstanding any other provision of these Articles, the Corporation shall not carry on any other activities not permitted to be carried on (a) by a corporation exempt from federal income tax under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, or the corresponding section of any future federal tax code, or (b) by a corporation, contributions to which are deductible under section 170(c)(2) of the Internal Revenue Code, or the corresponding section of any future federal tax code.

(If reference to federal law in Articles of Incorporation imposes a limitation that is invalid in your state, you may wish to substitute the following for the last sentence of the preceding paragraph:

"Notwithstanding any other provision of these articles, this Corporation shall not, except to an insubstantial degree, engage in any activities or exercise any powers that are not in furtherance of the purposes of this Corporation.")

Sixth: Upon the dissolution of the Corporation, assets shall be distributed for one or more exempt purposes within the meaning of section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, or the corresponding section of any future federal tax code, or shall be distributed to the federal government, or to a state or local government, for a public purpose. Any such assets not so disposed of shall be disposed of by a Court of Competent Jurisdiction of the county in which the principal office of the Corporation is then located, exclusively for such purposes or to such organization or organizations, as said Court shall determine, which are organized and operated exclusively for such purposes.

In witness whereof, we have hereunto subscribed our names this ____ day of ____, 20__.

ATTACHMENT 2

SAMPLE BYLAWS

FOR AN AVA VOLKSSPORT CLUB

**BYLAWS
OF
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX Volkssport Club**

**ARTICLE I
General**

These Bylaws are established to implement the Articles of Incorporation of this organization and the Constitution and Bylaws of the American Volkssport Association (AVA).

**ARTICLE II
Membership**

Section 1. Classes of Membership. There shall be two classes of membership in this corporation:

a. Regular membership, which shall be limited to those individuals and families whose dues are current;

b. Honorary membership, which may be conferred by the club on an individual whose actions have greatly assisted or promoted the aims of the club or the AVA.

Section 2. Rights and Obligations of Members.

a. Rights. Every regular member, 16 years of age or older, is entitled to exercise the right to vote. (Honorary membership confers no voting privileges.)

b. Obligations. All members of the organization are obligated to:

- (1) Promote the aims and goals of the club and the AVA to the best of their abilities;
- (2) Uphold the reputation of the club and the AVA at all times;
- (3) Obey the Bylaws of the club and the Constitution and Bylaws of the AVA; and
- (4) Pay dues as required.

Section 3. Dues. Regular members must pay annual dues of \$6.00 per individual or \$12.00 per family, payable in advance before the expiration of their current year's membership. Notification of dues shall be given one month prior to a member's expiration of membership. Dues not paid within thirty (30) days thereafter shall be automatically dropped from membership in the organization. At the Board's option, notification of dues may be provided through the monthly club newsletter.

**ARTICLE III
Officers**

Section 1. Officers. The officers of the organization shall be President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer and Trailmaster. Such other officers and assistant officers as may be deemed necessary may be elected or appointed by the President.

Section 2. Eligibility. No member shall hold more than one office at a time. No member shall serve in the office of President or Vice-President for more than two consecutive terms.

Section 3. Nomination Procedures. At a regular meeting held in the month of March, a Nominating Committee of three (3) members shall be elected by the organization. It shall be the duty of this committee to nominate candidates for the offices to be filled at the annual meeting. The Nominating Committee shall make its report to the membership in the month of May no later than the meeting prior to the scheduled election. Before the election at the annual meeting, additional nominations from the floor are permitted.

Section 4. Elections. The officers shall be elected by ballot of the regular members of the organization at the annual membership meeting. Where only one (1) candidate for an office has been nominated, no ballots shall be cast by the members and the Secretary shall cast the unanimous ballot of the meeting. In the event that more than two (2) candidates are nominated for the same office and upon the first ballot no candidate receives a majority of the ballots cast, the two (2) candidates receiving the most ballots shall run against each other. Upon the subsequent ballot, the candidate receiving the majority vote shall be declared elected.

Section 5. Terms of Office. The officers shall hold office for a term of one year or until their successors are elected. Their term of office shall begin on July 1 each year.

Section 6. Duties. Club officers shall perform the duties prescribed by these Bylaws and by Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised.

a. **President.** The President presides at all meetings of the organization and special meetings called by the Executive Board. The President nominates and the Executive Board approves appointments of committees to represent the organization officially in all affairs. The President is an ex officio member of all committees of the organization except the Nominating Committee.

b. **Vice-President.** The Vice-President shall act as President in the President's absence. The Vice-President plans the annual programs, monthly if applicable, of the organization.

c. **Secretary.** The Secretary shall be responsible for recording and maintaining minutes of all meetings of the regular membership and the Executive Board; sending out the call to each member for special membership meetings of the organization and of the Executive Board, maintaining the official list of officers and members of the organization, preparing general correspondence of the organization that is not a function of other officers or committees, and supervising the publishing of the club newsletter.

d. **Treasurer.** The Treasurer shall be responsible for keeping an accurate account of all monies of the organization, collecting all monies due and depositing them in the organization's bank account, and making payments which have been authorized, preparing a Treasurer's report for each meeting of the organization, submitting a full financial report to the members at the organization's annual meeting, and submitting a proposed annual budget to the membership at the annual meeting for review and approval. The Treasurer prepares and submits financial reports required by AVA or local law.

e. **Trailmaster.** The Trailmaster shall be responsible for approval of all sanctioned AVA events, assuring that event routes are properly sanctioned and safe. The Trailmaster assures that the club has sufficient event-related supplies for start/finish and checkpoint locations, safety of participants and materials to mark trails for participants to follow. The Trailmaster shall keep an archive file of walk directions and maps for each sanctioned event conducted by the club.

ARTICLE IV Meetings

Section 1. Regular Meetings. The regular meetings of the organization shall be held on the _____ of each month unless otherwise ordered by the organization.

Section 2. Annual Meeting. The regular meeting each June shall be known as the Annual Meeting and shall be for the purpose of electing officers, receiving reports of officers and committees, and for any other business that may arise. The Secretary shall notify each member in writing of the date, time, and place of the Annual Meeting.

Section 3. Special Meetings. Special meetings may be called by the President or by the Executive Board and shall be called upon written request of ten (10) members of the organization. The purpose shall be stated in the call and no business shall be transacted except that mentioned in the call of the Special Meeting. Except in cases of emergency, at least five (5) days' written notice shall be given.

Section 4. Quorum. Twenty (20) percent of the regular members, (OPTIONAL, or a majority of the elected officers) of the organization shall constitute a quorum.

ARTICLE V Executive Board

Section 1. Members. The officers of the organization shall constitute the Executive Board.

Section 2. Powers. The Executive Board shall have the general supervision of the affairs of the organization between its business meetings, fix the hour and place of meetings, make recommendations to the organization, and perform such other duties as are specified in these Bylaws. The Board shall be subject to the orders of the organization and none of its acts shall conflict with action taken by the organization.

Section 3. Meetings. Unless otherwise ordered by the membership, regular meetings of the Executive Board shall be held at the call of the President.

ARTICLE VI Committees

Section 1. Appointment. Committees, standing or special, shall be appointed by the President, with the advice and approval of the Executive Board, as deemed necessary to carry on the work of the organization. The President shall be a member ex officio of all committees except the Nominating Committee.

Section 2. Finance Committee. A Finance Committee composed of the Treasurer and four (4) other members shall be appointed by the President promptly after each Annual Meeting. It shall be the duty of this committee to prepare a budget for the fiscal year and to submit it to the organization at its annual meeting. The Finance Committee may from time to time submit supplements to the budget for the current fiscal year.

Section 3. Events and Trails Committee. An Events and Trails Committee of up to seven (7) members shall be appointed by the President, whose duty it shall be to assist the Trailmaster and set the club's agenda for club events and year-round events (YRE) for the coming year.

Section 4. Program Committee. A Program Committee of up to five (5) members shall be appointed by the President to assist the Vice-President to plan annual and monthly, if applicable, programs of the organization.

Section 5. Auditing Committee. An Auditing Committee of three (3) members shall be appointed by the President at the regular meeting just prior to the organization's annual meeting, whose duty it shall be to audit the Treasurer's accounts at the close of the fiscal year and to report the results at the Annual Meeting.

Section 6. Other Committees. Such other committees, standing or special, shall be appointed by the President as the organization or the Executive Board shall from time to time deem necessary to carry on the work of the organization.

ARTICLE VII Parliamentary Authority

The rules contained in the current edition of Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised shall govern the organization in all cases to which they are applicable and in which they are not inconsistent with these Bylaws and any special rules of order the organization may adopt.

ARTICLE VIII
Dissolution

The organization may be dissolved by a two-thirds vote of the membership. Upon dissolution of the organization, assets shall be distributed to a non-profit organization, within the meaning of section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, or the corresponding section of any future federal tax code.

ARTICLE IX
Amendment of Bylaws

These Bylaws may be amended at any regular meeting of the organization by a two-thirds vote of the membership, provided that the amendment has been submitted in writing at the previous regular meeting.

Date Approved:

President:

Secretary: