

Ways to Make Men's Sheds Work in America

How Men's Sheds are Started

In the US, we have two different ways for local individuals or groups to start a Men's Shed in your community. One approach is for an existing non-profit organization to add a Men's Shed as another of their activities, and the other approach is to start a Men's Shed as a new non-profit organization. Which one works best for you depends on some important factors.

Sponsorship

The Sponsorship Approach is used to start a new Men's Shed as an "Activity," under the sponsorship of a parent organization such as a community center, city government, health service, YMCA, etc. This approach is a great way to start a Men's Shed when you don't have much money, because the Sponsoring organization provides you with critical resources to get the new Shed started quickly and at no cost to you. In this approach, the sponsoring, or parent, organization saves you the time and money you would otherwise have to spend when setting up a new Men's Shed, such as getting your own tax-exempt status, facility costs, liability protection, operating expenses and business services.

The advantages of using the Sponsorship-approach can be:

- Your Men's Shed receives the immediate strength of the parent organization's identity and tax-free status.
- The Shed saves the money and effort needed to incorporate and therefore, does not have to form a formal Board of Directors or submit tax filings.
- The Shed uses a free venue to start meetings and hold activities right away.
- The parent organization provides free office services, such as mailing, answering phones, making copies, developing promotions and other services
- Because the Shed is included as an activity of a parent organization, it receives liability protection that you would have to otherwise have to pay for.
- Banking support can be provided to the new Shed allowing you to immediately accept tax-free donations through the parent organization.

Possible disadvantages can be:

- The sponsoring organisation does have influence on decision making and direction of the shed, including what activities it allows or prohibits, their Shed to do, such as the use of power tools.

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- The sponsoring organization will control the hours of operation and the access to facilities used by the Men's Shed.
- The sponsoring organization may have restrictions on the space that the Men's Shed may need and what can be done there.

Independent Organization

The Independent, or Stand-Alone approach requires registering and establishing your new Men's Shed as an independent legal entity in your state and with the US IRS. Experience shows that this can take, on average, from six-months to a year to setup, and the investment of \$1,000 to \$2,000 in start-up costs. It also requires the Shed's leader or Board of Directors to obtain and maintain their own facility, or venue, to hold their meetings.

The advantages of using the Standalone-approach typically are:

- Your Shed will be relatively independent in decision making and have its own identity.
- The Shed is not limited to the size, availability or capabilities of the venue they wish to have.
- You can set your own days and hours of operation and have direct access to the venue whenever the members want.

Possible disadvantage can be:

- You will have the immediate need for money to start the incorporation processes and purchase liability insurance
- You must find, and possibly pay for, your own venue
- The Shed cannot open its doors until the incorporation process is completed
- There is increased risk and responsibility for the Shed and its Members, such as managing the safe use of tools, providing staffing and maintaining the venue.
- It requires more management time, effort and skills from the leadership and members than the Sponsorship approach

Regardless of the final decision on the approach you take to starting your local Men's Shed, the key to having a successful Shed is that the Members enjoy being with the group and enjoying the company of men.