



## Running your Committee

### Setting up your committee

Your first step on the journey towards Autism-Friendly Towns status is putting in place a Committee which represents a cross-section of your local community. In this section, we provide advice on how to achieve this

- **Committee Contract**

All Committees are required to sign a contract with AsIAM which permits the participation in the process and their access to the suite of materials we have developed. This contract will be sent to each Committee for digital signature and non-compliance with its terms could lead a Committee's disqualification from the process. You can see the contract in full in the Toolkit portal

- **Requirements of committees**

Whilst a large degree of discretion is given to each committee in terms of its make-up and how it choose to do its work, there are core requirements for each Committee which are amongst the terms included in the Committee Contract, namely:

- Must include at least one Autistic community member
- Must include at least one parent of an Autistic person
- Should include representation from existing support group(s) in the area
- Should include representatives of key organisations in the town/community e.g. GAA, Chamber of Commerce, TidyTowns, Community Garda
- Each Committee must have a Chairperson who is the designated point of contact for AsIAM
- Each Committee should have a Treasurer and Secretary
- Each Committee should have at least two designated social media officers
- Each Committee should have an annual general meeting to select the Committee for the coming year and to review progress
- Each Committee should give consideration to its required governance structure and confirm in their application for the Award that they are in compliance with all statutory obligations they may have
- Require all Committee Members to sign the Code of Conduct

### Code of Conduct for Committee Members

All Committee Members must sign a Code of Conduct in which they commit to act in accordance with the best interests of the committee and ascribe to the values underpinning the Autism-Friendly Towns Award. A copy of this Code of Conduct is included in Toolkit portal

## **Governance guidance**

Depending on the ambition of your 3 year plan and the cohort of organisations which are represented on your Committee, you may decide upon various different governance structures to underpin your work.

### **Project specific committee**

By far the most simple governance structure for your activity will be partnering with an organisation which is already registered as a charity or local group within your locality. For example, if there is an existing autism support group it might be sensible to have the Autism-Friendly Committee as a sub-group of that existing structure. This removes the potential requirement for charitable registration or the opening of bank accounts.

### **Constitutional/unincorporated organisation**

If there is no existing organisation for you to partner with a good option may be to consider registering with your Local Public Participation Network and seek a meeting with your Local Authority Community Liaison Officer. Registering with the PPN may provide you with a range of supports for getting your group off the ground, including being connected with existing organisations.

You may need to register with the Charities Regulatory Authority as an unincorporated entity. This minimises the level of governance requirements compared to those associated with registered companies or more complex charities but you would be required to meet the minimum requirements set out in the Charities Governance Code. This structure is used by many local groups such as TidyTowns or Resident's Associations. The Charities Regulator has a model constitution which your group could choose to adopt and this is available on the Regulator's website

### **Incorporated organisation**

Overtime some unincorporated organisations decide to progress to becoming incorporated associations as this allows an entity to do things such as enter into contracts. This is certainly an option open to Committees to consider but is the most complex structure

**It is highly advised that all Committees get advice on the structure which is most suitable to them and their plans.**

## **Other governance considerations**

In addition to your Committee's legal structure it is important to consider other governance requirements including:

- **Insurance** – will the activities you are undertaking require insurance cover?
- **Data Protection** – how are you holding and managing data?

- **Bank account** – does the committee intend to handle cash? If so, it will need to setup a bank account
- **Child Protection / Safeguarding** – will you be working with children and vulnerable adults? If so it will be essential to get the relevant volunteers garda vetted and to ensure Committee members have the training that they need. Talk to your local Volunteer Centre for support and guidance with garda vetting

### **Training & support**

AsIAM is committed to providing a range of training to Committees to support them in their work including:

- **Access to GDPR training** – one free licence to an online training module will be purchased for each Committee by AsIAM
- **Children First** – you can access free training on child protection through Tusla.ie
- **Governance training** – AsIAM will fund attendance at a governance training course from The Wheel for 2 Committee members if this is something a Committee wishes to access
- **General training for the committee** – AsIAM will provide one training/briefing to each Committee as required.

In addition to this introductory training, follow on support and information will be provided to Committees in several ways including:

- The monthly meeting of towns which will include relevant briefings on particular aspects of the award, as identified by feedback from Committee members
- Committees will be supported to share information with one another, should Committee members give consent to being connected directly
- AsIAM will be available to Committees to answer questions as they arise

### **Committee Terms of Reference**

We are conscious that committees will be made up of volunteers and the scope of work is significant. In order to have an effective committee which is efficient and well run it is important that all Committee Members have a shared understanding of what the function of the group is. Autism acceptance is a major social issue with many different approaches, campaigns and people in need of support. Our advice to Committees is to clearly frame for both Committee Members and the general public what your role is, signposting to other groups or to AsIAM directly issues or queries which are not in your scope of work.

To achieve this clarity in Clonakilty, we developed a Terms of Reference. It is a matter for each Committee to decide how they want to approach its scope and ways of working but we would advise considering the document as a starting point which you can adjust to your own needs and get the committee to sign off on at the start of the year. A copy of the Terms of Reference is included in the Toolkit portal

### **Committee roles**

Each committee should assign roles to individual Committee Members this allows responsibilities to be shared evenly and for each Committee Member to bring their own strengths to bear. Each Committee can decide what roles it would like to assign but at a minimum should select:

- **Chairperson** – This person will prepare the agenda for the meeting, chair the meetings, act as point of contact for ASIAm and lead the overall work of the committee
- **Secretary** – This person will be responsible for the correspondence received or issued by the Committee, taking minutes and ensuring good record keeping
- **Treasurer** – If you intend to fundraise or handle money, it will be necessary to have a Treasurer who will be responsible for managing the bank account, approving expenditure, lodging any funds received and preparing accounts for the Committee to consider. If a bank account is set up, the Chairperson and Treasurer should act as co-signatories
- **Public Relations / Social Media Officer (x 2)** – We recommend each Committee has two Public Relations / Social Media Officers to share the work and ensure that the community is regularly updated on progress. Having two individuals ensures that access to social media accounts is retained even after someone leaves a Committee