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MINNESOTA UNITED
SNOWMOBILERS ASSOCIATION**

Organizing a Club



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Table of Contents

<i>Introduction</i>	<i>Page 4</i>
<i>Role of the Club</i>	<i>Page 6</i>
<i>Snowmobilers and the local club</i>	<i>Page 9</i>
<i>Organizing a Club</i>	<i>Page 10</i>
<i>Initial organizational meeting</i>	<i>Page 12</i>
<i>The first formal meeting</i>	<i>Page 17</i>
<i>Club activities</i>	<i>Page 19</i>
<i>Background Material</i>	<i>Page 21</i>
<i>The organizational committee</i>	<i>Page 21</i>
<i>Incorporation</i>	<i>Page 22</i>
<i>Nonprofit corporations</i>	<i>Page 24</i>
<i>The objectives committee</i>	<i>Page 24</i>
<i>The nominating committee</i>	<i>Page 25</i>
<i>The membership committee</i>	<i>Page 26</i>
<i>The publicity committee</i>	<i>Page 26</i>

Introduction

Why should I join a snowmobile club?

The sport of snowmobiling has been and continues to be a very popular form of winter outdoor recreation. Snowmobile clubs are an integral part of this popular sport—and with good reason. From fun to safety, the combined efforts of snowmobilers can accomplish far more than any one snowmobiler can individually. In fact, the possibilities are limited only by the collective imagination and talent of a club's members.

Moreover, the club can save you work and increase the pleasure of snowmobiling by spreading the work behind organized events and marked and maintained trails and use areas among many hands.

A club can help you have more fun more safely with less effort and often less cost.

What kinds of activities do snowmobile clubs engage in?

A list of actual snowmobile club activities would cover many pages. It would include development of trail networks and use areas, organized competitive events, trail rides, safety clinics, fund raising for charity, camping trips, rescue work, maintenance clinics, newsletter publication, and work with private and public landowners and managers. Club activities are most often family-oriented, so that all ages join in the fun, and also the work to make the fun possible.

Snowmobile clubs sound like good ideas – but do they work?

They certainly do! Just look at the record in two areas: trail development and fund raising for charity. Today some 150,000 miles of signed and maintained public trails are available to snowmobilers – a very significant achievement. With regard to charitable activities, on an annual basis, more than two million dollars are raised by organized snowmobilers for various charities in Canada and the United States – another impressive accomplishment.

I am most concerned about securing areas to use and enjoy my machine. Can clubs help here?

The importance of snowmobile clubs is most evident in just this area. Again and again, snowmobile clubs have secured permission to use parcels of land in return for provisions for management and maintenance by the club. An individual is hardly capable of providing similar assurances.

The club's role in governmental land-use decision-making is still more important. The club provides public land managers with a permanent contact and a responsible party to turn to for advice.

But many laws which effect me are passed at the state or provincial and federal levels! How can a club help me here?

Most active clubs specialize in community-level activities and link their resources with those of other clubs in their state or province through an association (Minnesota United Snowmobilers Association - www.mnsnowmobiler.org) or federation of state/provincial snowmobilers (American

Council of Snowmobile Associations - www.snowmobilers.org). Again, the added numbers of snowmobilers and the aggregate talents of the clubs ensure the best representation of each snowmobiler's interests.

Moreover, some thirty-seven associations and federations pool their experiences and ideas through the International Snowmobile Council. Thus, by belonging to a club, you can have this entire array of resources at your service! A list of ISC members can be found at:
<http://www.snowmobilers.org/organizations.asp>

Fine. I'm convinced. But there is no strong snowmobile club near me. What can I do?

Great! The rest of the book is designed just for that purpose – to help *you* organize an effective local club.

The Role of a Club

For more than five decades, snowmobiling has offered an attractive mode of outdoor winter recreation to millions of North Americans living in snow belt areas. Few recent developments have exhibited a social impact of magnitude similar to that associated with the perfection of the lightweight snowmobile. While snowmobilers are used extensively for utilitarian purposes, from rescue work to farming, from trapping to transport, the heart of snowmobile use remains recreational in nature.

Freed from the isolation of a housebound winter, snowmobilers have discovered a new mechanism for social interaction, as families get together in clubs or groups. To those who have made the change, there is no finer activity

than suiting up and taking off for a daylong junket across the fields and through the forests. It is an invigorating and exhilarating experience, a test of skill, and a means of developing a kinship with friends and neighbors.

Fifty years ago, release from the somber atmosphere of severe winter conditions was markedly more difficult and the available recreational options much fewer. Today, this release remains secret only from those have never tried snowmobiling, for a few hours of snowmobiling experience leave a lasting impression.

While snowmobiling should be fun, its very nature demands compliance with certain stands of operation to ensure personal safety. The Snowmobile Safety and Certification Committee (SSCC) developed a comprehensive program on safe snowmobile operation. The program includes an operator's handbook, a safety program instructor's manual and a program administrator's guide.

Similarly, the operation of snowmobilers must conform to certain laws and codes to avoid unnecessary infringements on the rights of others. Minnesota's Snowmobile Rules and Regulations handbook can be found at: <http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/regulations/snowmobile/index.html>.

In order for snowmobilers to expect the right to use snowmobiles, they must be willing to respect the needs and desires of other outdoor recreation participants. Both in this area and in terms of safety, snowmobile clubs have again and again played key roles.

In the past, isolated cases of snowmobile abuse have contributed heavily to forcing snowmobilers to be defensive about their sport. Outraged members of the non-

snowmobiling public have in many instances succeeded in forcing legislative overreaction on the strength of universal opposition to the antics of irresponsible and inconsiderate operators. The future of snowmobiling is dependent in large measure upon actions by responsible operators to control these abuses. To do this, snowmobilers must use clubs to exert peer pressure. Each snowmobiler and club should consider adopting the International Snowmobile Council snowmobile “Code of Ethics”:

1. I will be a good sportsman. I recognize that many people with judge all snowmobile owners by my actions. I will use my influence with other snowmobile owners to promote sportsmanlike conduct.
2. I will maintain clean trails and use areas. I will work to ensure clean and pure streams and lakes.
3. I will safeguard living trees, shrubs, and other natural features.
4. I will respect other people’s property and rights.
5. I will lend a helping hand when I see someone in distress.
6. I will make myself and my vehicle available to assist search-and-rescue parties.
7. I will respect the rights of hikers, skiers, snowshoers, ice fishermen and other winter sportsmen. I will respect their rights to enjoy our recreational facilities.
8. I will energetically strive to bring other winter recreation participants to recognize and respect my rights as a snowmobiler by explaining my needs and, at the same time, listening to their needs.

9. I will learn and obey all federal, provincial, state and local rules regulating the operation of snowmobiles in areas where I use my vehicle. I will inform public officials, as required, when using public lands.
10. I will not harass wildlife, and will always avoid areas posted for the protection or feeding of wildlife.
11. I will use marked trails, areas, and roads open to snowmobiles. I will not travel where prohibited.

Snowmobilers and the local club

Each club will inevitably play many roles. Undoubtedly, it can be the most effective way to maximize the enjoyment of snowmobiling while simultaneously building up a reputable public image for the sport of snowmobiling. For the club members, many benefits accrue, including:

1. Association with active people having similar interests for group activities, such as:
 - a. Winter picnics and barbeques,
 - b. Weekend tours
 - c. Rallies of all sorts
 - d. Moonlight tours
 - e. Competitive events, and
 - f. Community functions
2. Sharing of knowledge and experience about the machines and user areas;
3. Expanded opportunities to work with local landowners;
4. Manpower to plan, construct, mark, groom and otherwise maintain trails;
5. An organization to sponsor safety clinics and host

equipment demonstrations; and

6. A potent force to explain the needs of snowmobilers before officials at the local and regional levels, particularly with regard to land-use planning and regulatory decisions.

Snowmobilers also benefit indirectly because the club becomes an identifiable, permanent entity with which local officials and landowners can deal both in emergencies and in long-term decision making. To accentuate this permanence, each club should maintain a fixed mailing address, usually a local post office box, to facilitate communications with these groups. Continuing consideration of others by club members will enable the many responsible snowmobile users to avoid categorization with the discourteous few.

Finally, snowmobiling is intimately tied to the important question of land-use regulations. It is essential that the land needs of snowmobile users be publicly expressed so that these needs can be reflected at the local, state, provincial, and ultimately, federal levels as priorities for land-use planning are formulated. The collective talents of local club members are almost certain to surpass the talents of any one member in grappling with this complex issue, and the political potential of a club will greatly assist efforts to meet snowmobilers' needs.

Organizing a Club

It is more than likely that you will find a snowmobile club in operation in your vicinity. If, however, you find that no club exists in your immediate area, or that the club has failed to become active, don't be discouraged. Many of the most

dynamic clubs have been started by a handful of enthusiasts who decided that a few hours of their time at the start were worth the ultimate benefits to be derived from club membership. If you know of ten or more snowmobilers in your area not belonging to another, potentially competitive club, the chances are good that the necessary ingredients for an active club are present. A common love of snowmobiling is likely to be more than adequate cement for this group bond.

If you feel that the opportunity exists, here are some of the steps we recommend:

1. Talk to your friends who are active snowmobilers. Also identify and approach identifiable community figures who regularly snowmobile. Avoid the temptation to become overly restrictive in identifying the prospective membership of your organization.
2. Form a working committee of three or four enthusiastic individuals to plan the initial meeting and to divide the necessary work during the early states of the club. Regular and frequent work sessions should be planned.
3. Visit your local snowmobile dealers. They are very likely to provide assistance of many kinds, from “technical” advice to meeting space.
4. Compile a data base on snowmobile owners in your area. Local dealers, police and public officials may be able to assist you through their records.
5. Establish contact with local newspapers and television

and radio stations. Alert them to your plans.

Initial organizational meeting

At this point, you are ready to plan your first meeting to guide the creation of a local club. It is important that most arrangements be made far enough in advance, preferably one month. This should include securing a meeting room, chairs, refreshments, pads and pencils. Then take the following steps:

- Select a meeting date with great care. Obtain a community calendar, and check with major local organizations to discover serious conflicts with other community events. Ultimately, the date should be chosen approximately three weeks in advance.
- Once the date of the meeting is selected, rapid action becomes essential. Printed announcements should be mailed to all known snowmobile owners in your data base.
- Notify the news media by letter, email and in person. Arrangement interviews if possible. Photographs are also a desirable device to increase community interest.
- Arrange to be placed on any community activity calendars and place notices at strategic locations in your community (such as gas stations, snowmobile dealers, post offices and other high-visibility public places).
- Apportion groups of names from your data base to the working committee members and a handful of other enthusiastic people. Each person should call the names assigned approximately four days prior to the scheduled meeting.

-Discuss the purposes of your prospective club. Prepare a handout for the meeting listing these purposes. Among those you may wish to consider are:

1. Promote greater interest in snowmobiling;
2. Work for new or improved snowmobile laws, including those which would ensure the use of registration fees and gasoline tax revenues for snowmobile trail and use area development;
3. Promote the development of snowmobile trails; campsites and other facilities;
4. Improve the public image of snowmobile users by educating and encouraging users in the safe, considerate, and courteous use of snowmobiles;
5. Work with government officials and others toward mutually satisfactory rules for broader use by snowmobiles of government lands;
6. Promote the use of snowmobiles as family sports vehicles;
7. Promote properly organized snowmobile trips, rallies and competitions;
8. Promote friendliness and good fellowship among snowmobile owners;
9. Cooperate with police, fire, and Civil Defense officials, and other community organizations by providing snowmobiles for emergency duty;
10. Promote the healthful benefits of snowmobiling as an

outdoor winter activity.

Be sure to have attendance cards to be filled out at the meeting and name tags to be worn by all in attendance. If possible, folders should be prepared for all who attend with information on snowmobile products and area facilities. A supply of these can be maintained for use at later meetings as well.

Plan to designate five committee chairpersons at the meeting. These individuals should be selected prior to the session from among those showing the most interest in forming a club. The five suggested committees are:

1. Organizational Committee – to develop bylaws and plan for initial meetings;
2. Objectives Committee – to recommend specific goals, policies, and purposes;
3. Nominating Committee – to select a slate of directors at the first formal meeting of the club;
4. Membership Committee – to maintain the card file, and send out notices of meetings, and plan a membership drive beginning at the first meeting;
5. Publicity Committee – to work with all other committees and publicize their efforts, to select a recommended name for the club to be presented at the first official meeting.

Background information for each committee is provided herein. All committee members should receive copies of this information.

The membership of these committees should be left open to

volunteers at the initial organizational meeting. Your club will be much more successful if virtually all members are allowed and encouraged to participate in its initial design and subsequent operation.

Of the five initial committees, the first three will operate regularly for only a short time. The Membership and Publicity Committees, in contrast, will continue to function indefinitely. The members of the first three committees might well be encouraged at a later date to transfer their energies to the Activities Committee, which should be formed at the second club meeting.

The Working Committee and the individuals selected to head the five committees should select a temporary presiding officer. He or she must be enthusiastic about the club and forceful enough to lead the organizational meeting, while at the same time being fair-minded and responsive to the audience. The single most important characteristic of an effective chairperson is adequate preparation. The Working Committee and those designated to serve as committee chairpersons should meet with the temporary presiding officer several days prior to the actual meeting to review all issues in detail, and plan a date for a second meeting.

Finally, the temporary presiding officer should prepare an agenda for the meeting on consultation with the members of the Working Committee. Although the meeting should be kept short, several critical issues must be resolved. A basic recommended agenda follows:

1. Presiding officer calls the meeting to order;
2. Presiding officer reads a statement of purposes of the meeting and some specific objectives for the proposed club. [*These should be carefully prepared and in*

writing];

3. Presiding officer calls on a number of people to speak about the club. [*This is your selling job, so select your speakers from your most prominent and enthusiastic supporters. Plan this part carefully in advance*];
4. Presiding officer calls for a motion to organize a local snowmobile club. [*Here, timing is important and the call should come as interest peaks. Someone should have been designated in advance to make this motion and other person readied to second it. Allow for a brief discussion of the specific motion and then call for a vote by the audience*];
5. Presiding officer appoints the committees previously discussed. [*Again, have someone selected in advance to make a proper motion and someone to second it. Allow for brief discussion on this motion, specifically, and then call for a vote*];
6. Presiding officer designates the five chairpersons previously selected and calls for volunteers for each committee [*Five sign-up sheets can be placed in various parts of the room, and the appointed chairpersons can then proceed to the appropriate areas*];
7. Presiding officer opens the meeting to general discussion, comments and suggestions [*The necessary business of the initial organizational meeting has been accomplished. During this open period, the meeting should continue to move briskly; longwinded, aimless discussion will diminish interest. At this point, you may wish to discuss names for the club. Often, however, a contest for this purpose, run by the Publicity Committee, is a better mechanism to stir interest*];

8. Presiding officer calls for adjournment [*This should occur as soon as discussion begins to lag. Someone should be prepared to offer a motion which includes the date for the next meeting, as previously selected by the Working Committee*].

The First Formal Meeting

At this point, your club is well on the way to becoming an active reality. The difficult, time-demanding organizational phase of your club's history is drawing to a close, and each member will begin to receive direct benefits.

Certainly much work remains. Each of the committees must diligently address its tasks prior to the next meeting, but the necessary efforts have been spread among more individuals, and your club has developed its own momentum. The Organizational Committee should develop an agenda for the second meeting which will then be circulated among all other committees well in advance of the second meeting. A suitable agenda might be:

1. Presiding officer calls the meeting to order and calls for the reading of the minutes from the previous meeting [*Any changes or additions should be called for*];
2. The Organizational Committee reports a suggested set of bylaws [*Printed copies should be made available to all attending the meeting. We recommend establishing a Board of Directors to manage the general business of the club, with the Board of Directors being elected by the entire active membership of the club. This gives a broader base for representatives of various groups and interests within the club to have a voice in its management. This should be fully explained by the Committee Chairman to all present. Any proposed*

changes should be discussed and voted upon];

3. The bylaws are then offered to the body of attending persons for approval;
4. The Objectives Committee reports on its work, to be followed by discussion of its recommendations; subsequently, the Committee should offer a formal “Statement of Objectives” for approval by all present;
5. The Membership Committee next formally offers charter membership in the club in return for payment of the annual dues [*The amount of the dues should be jointly determined by this Committee and the Organizational Committee prior to the meeting. Once all have been offered this opportunity, the business session shall resume*];
6. The Nominating Committee offers to the club a recommended slate of offers as called for in the bylaws; subsequently all present who have formally joined the club shall be allowed to vote by secret ballot [*Ballots listing the Committee’s choices and providing ample space for write-in nominations should be carefully distributed. Tallying should be done by two uninterested parties. Following tabulations, the results should be announced and an initial Executive meeting should be scheduled*];
7. The Publicity Committee reports on its activities [*A suggestion for naming the club should be made. The members may then either approve or select from the Committee recommendations*];
8. The Presiding officer then thanks the members of the committees, and announces the formation of an Activities Committee to coordinate and plan local and regional

social events;

9. The meeting should then be opened for general discussion [*Possible topics of consideration include:*
 - a. *Various projects for the club during both the winter and summer months – snowmobile trips, ice fishing, machine-use clinics, winter and summer picnics and cookouts, camping trips, competitions for both adult drivers and juniors, races, rallies and jamborees,*
 - b. *Cooperation with local authorities, Civil Defense, and other civic and service groups on community problems and in emergencies,*
 - c. *Development of authorized snowmobile trails, use areas, and campsites,*
 - d. *Affiliation with other clubs and regional snowmobile associations for exchanges of information on all phases of snowmobiling,*
 - e. *Development of a Snowmobile Safety Training Program encouraging the proper use of snowmobiles for both youth and adult riders].*
10. The club discusses and adopts a regular meeting schedule.
11. The Presiding officer then calls for a motion to adjourn.

Club Activities

As initial organization demands diminish, the realm of possible activities for club members generally increases. While planned club events represent one possible focus of attention, your club will soon find that it will also inspire more spontaneous undertakings.

It is also likely that your club could benefit by contacting

neighboring clubs, exchanging ideas and scheduling joint activities. Trail development has been most successful in areas where several clubs have assumed responsibility for specific trail segments. Ideally, trails to adjoining communities should be planned, for this can establish safe user areas while still providing new terrain and scenery.

Many clubs have found that a great deal of productivity is evident if each month and meeting have a specialized focus. One suggested schedule follows:

<u>Month</u>	<u>Focus</u>
August	Review of the previous year; review of existing snowmobile legislation; development of club position on desired changes.
September	Trail development efforts – local and state
October	Discussion of new snowmobile improvements and developments
November	Club trail rides and other winter activities
December	Community service activities
January	Legislative action – federal and state
February	Club promotion; non-member activities
March	Machine maintenance and storage clinics
April	Club elections; annual banquet
May-July	Community activities; preparation for new season programs; summer social activities

Perhaps the most important possibilities for action by mature clubs, however, are those which allow them to shape the development of the sport. For example, club members can work with local legislators and enforcement officials in a mutually beneficial fashion. Club members can also work in their communities to introduce people to the fun of snowmobiling.

In closing, remember that clubs can and should be politically active locally. This represents just a start, however, for overall effectiveness can be markedly improved by joint efforts with other clubs through state associations. Just as a club can provide a political voice more powerful than that of any of its individual members, a state association can increase the effectiveness of its constituent clubs. Moreover, by banding together, clubs can work to achieve a uniform governmental role in trail development, as well as other positive steps by the state to encourage safe and enjoyable snowmobiling.

Finally, state associations are excellent conduits for the exchange of ideas. Equipped with good ideas and enthusiastic members, any snowmobile club is assured of organizational success and many pleasant experiences for its membership.

Background Material

This section is intended to provide additional, in-depth information for use by club organizers and members of specialized committees during the early portion of the club's development. It contains committee assignments and

supportive materials for the Organizational Committee, Objectives Committee, Nominating Committee, Membership Committee and Publicity Committee.

The Organizational Committee

The primary objective of the Organizational Committee is to formulate a workable set of bylaws for your club. Among other items, this committee must examine such issues as:

- Advantages/disadvantages of formal incorporation
- Types of memberships and amount of annual dues, in conjunction with the Membership Committee
- Frequency of meetings, and
- Election procedures.

Professional legal talent can provide invaluable in these matters, and it is recommended that such assistance be obtained whenever possible.

Incorporation

Formal incorporation is not necessary for clubs, but is a matter of consideration. This is a subject which much be discussed with a competent local attorney.

Both types of organizations have advantages and disadvantages and state and local laws and regulations may warrant different decisions in different localities. Generally speaking, here are some of the advantages and disadvantages of the two types of organizations:

An unincorporated club –

1. Is a voluntary association that in the eyes of the law is not an entity or a person;

2. Has no local standing as an organization;
3. Cannot own, convey or mortgage property;
4. Is probably unable to borrow money or enter into any contract, and
5. Means every member of the club may be held personally liable for any act committed in the name of the club, even those who personally had nothing to do with the act or deed which gave rise to the debt or damage. Thus, if you are going to organize an unincorporated club, consult a competent local insurance representative. He/she may be able to offer a plan substantially reducing the liability of individual members.

An incorporated club –

1. Has limited liability which protects its members from being personally responsible for the debts or deeds of the club;
2. Has a separate legal existence;
3. Can exercise most powers that are available to individual persons;
4. Can own property, contract mortgage, and sue in the courts;
5. Can be sued as an entity but only to the extent of its limited liability;
6. Can have its interests easily transferred, and
7. Continues its existence regardless of what happens to individual members.

An incorporated club, however, has these general disadvantages:

1. Initial costs of incorporation for legal fees and filing fees with the state;
2. Filing requirements annual with the state to maintain active incorporation status and designate a registered agent, among other things;
3. Possible tax burdens on profits.

Nonprofit corporations

The nonprofit corporation is available in most states for “not-for-profit” organizations. This type of incorporation avoids much of the financial burden of other types of incorporation. It is the type of organization most favored by clubs operated not for profit, but seeking protection from club liabilities for the individual members.

The Objectives Committee

The Objectives Committee will play an important role in determining both the types and intensity of club activities. The mandates of this committee are:

- Identify major problems facing local snowmobilers and potential means to lessen these pressures;
- Examine the role of the club in the local community and define its commitment to community activities, and
- Conduct an ambitious survey of prospective members to

detect common interests.

It is suggested that, following the development of recommended priority objectives, the committee also prepare a listing of secondary objectives. Each of these lists should be fluid, and ideas voiced at later meetings should be incorporated according to the desires of the club.

The Nominating Committee

The exact character of the slate of individuals to be presented by the Nominating Committee will vary according to the organizational scheme selected by your club. The criteria for selection of candidates remain the same. To be successful, the club offers need to blend leadership with empathy. Local snowmobile clubs cannot lose sight of the fact that they are run by and for their members.

The Nominating Committee must also be conscious of the advantages of a well-rounded group of officers. These individuals should be representative of the snowmobilers in your area to the fullest possible extent. Occasionally, in the past, clubs have been overly “cliquish,” and have found this route invariably counter-productive. Such steps limit the attractiveness of club membership and thus decrease its potential.

Finally, while it is important to attract well-known community figures into the club, and even place them in leadership roles, it is mandatory that those nominated by the committee have sufficient time and interest to serve the club. If the club leadership fails to be energetic and industrious, regular club members hardly can be expected to remain enthusiastic.

The Membership Committee

The power of a club is not some mystical quality, but is rather the collective talents and ambitions of its members. Therefore, each club must devote significant energies to attracting and sustaining memberships.

During the initial stages of your club, this drive for members assumes extraordinary importance. A “critical mass” must be reached to sustain the club.

The secret to attracting members is simple: each prospective member must be convinced that he will derive sufficient benefits to outweigh his devotion of time and finances. A skillful strategy must be developed stressing the positive attributes of club membership.

This committee should also work with the Organizational Committee in establishing a dues schedule. Obviously it takes money to run any sort of organization, so some charge for membership dues will be necessary. Usually it is advisable to start out with a small amount. These dues should be paid in advance with the application for membership. In the future when more programs and activities are added, it may be necessary to increase the dues. At the very least, the dues collected should be sufficient to cover all regular expenses. Special events can be conducted so as to pay their own way and perhaps make a little profit for the club treasury, to be used to financial future club projects.

The Publicity Committee

Clubs require a “voice” to inform the surrounding community about their activities. Both the general good of the club and the success of individual programs are often

linked to area residents *outside* the club as well as the members themselves. Thus, the Publicity Committee must serve as one of the club's most active segments, on a continuing basis.

The Publicity Committee must cultivate contacts with local media representatives: radio, television and press. Over time, the particular interests of these people will be better understood by the committee members, and your dealings with the media will grow more productive. However, follow these simple rules at all times:

- Take advantage of community calendars (both print and digital) and similar public services offered by the media for both regular and special events,
- If your club is planning an unusual activity, send a “news release” to the local news media approximately one week prior to the scheduled date. Be sure to include the name of your club and the time and place of the event. Be concise! Include photographs whenever possible.
- A good, amateur photographer can be one of this committee's most valuable members.
- Provide the name, address, email address and telephone number of a knowledgeable member who can act as a spokesperson for your club in every mailing to local news media.

Additionally, the Publicity Committee should support and coordinate all publicity for the programs of other club committees, such as the Membership Committee and the Activities Committee. Regular preparation of posters listing upcoming events and club newsletters are within the province of this committee, as well.

One of the most important measures of a club is its success in achieving community recognition. An interesting name and an attractive, eye-catching emblem are important steps in this drive. Once selected, the design should be employed on club patches, posters, and signs. In this way, the design becomes a continuing trademark for the club. The Publicity Committee should address this matter within the first months of the club's development.

Notes:



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