

Trade associations are built to share knowledge and develop best practices, provide opportunities for members and help them network and export, as well as to voice their views and advocate for their interests.

However, starting an association can be challenging. This toolkit contains some examples from WIN associations around the world to help independent music companies kick-start their own.

## Find your peers

By definition, a trade association is a group of businesses. The first step is to find other independent music companies in your territory that are willing to embark on the project.



Talk to your personal connections and business colleagues.



[Send us an email](#), we may be able to provide the names of other companies that have shown an interest in joining WIN or establishing an association in your country.

## Define your territorial scope

Determine the territory of business registration for eligible members. WIN associations are typically nationwide, but regional associations representing multiple countries are also welcome.



The Regional Association of Independent Discographers Balkan represents record companies in Croatia, Slovenia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Kosovo and Northern Macedonia.

## Identify your target members

A new trade association should fill an unmet need in your community. Find out if there are already other associations operating in your territory.

Define the types of entities that will be eligible to join and under which terms. WIN associations must represent the interests of independent music companies who are engaged in the business of creating, marketing or distributing recorded music. Their members are mainly record labels, sometimes distributors and/or self-releasing artists.

Trade associations can also grant membership to other music industry professionals such as songwriters, publishers, producers/engineers, managers, booking agents, promoters, other trade bodies, retailers, tech companies. Determine which categories of businesses belong to core membership and which belong to an associate membership tier.

Friends, Partners and other associated memberships are programs offered by many trade associations for companies, brands and other entities interested in doing business and working closely with the independent sector, but not eligible for full membership.

Find out more about Friends/Partners programs [winformusic.org/friends](http://winformusic.org/friends)



## Develop a mission statement

A mission statement is a brief explanation of why an organization exists and its overall goals.



A2IM is the collective voice of independent music. Our mission is to promote growth, awareness, and opportunities for independent music through advocacy, education and community.



Levelling the playing field for independent music companies and their artists across Europe. IMPALA's mission is to grow the independent music sector sustainably, return more value to artists, promote diversity and entrepreneurship, improve political access, inspire change and increase access to finance.



Together we go further. Founded in 2002, ABMI is the voice of Brazilian independent producers in the Brazilian and international music market. Mission: Foster the organization, training and development of agents in the Brazilian phonographic sector in order to promote better financial results, business opportunities and their continuous strengthening.



Through transparency, trust and integrity, CIMA will be an advocacy leader, representing the national interests of the Canadian owned independent music industry, while providing targeted services for the economic benefit of its membership.



NZ's voice for independent record labels and distributors - advocating for and helping to promote these labels and their artists.

## Create an action plan

Create an action plan to guide your work. Identify challenges and establish priorities. Set short-term and long-term goals. List the services your association will provide and the projects it can undertake.

The pillars of action of independent music trade associations are:

**COOPERATION:** Access to a unique community of like-minded people who work together towards a common goal. Networking, knowledge sharing, leverage commercial opportunities, circulate benefits.

**REPRESENTATION:** Act through a single representative body. Advocacy, awareness raising, participation in public policy decision-making, level the playing field for independent music companies, promote financial support.

**EDUCATION:** Access to specialized information and resources in your niche. Professionalisation, capacity building, training, mentoring, host conferences and webinars. Develop best practices. Conduct market research.

**PROMOTION:** Promotion of independent repertoire locally and abroad. Celebrate and recognise independent music, organise awards, create playlists. Facilitate exports, organise trade missions.

## Decide on a legal structure

Most trade associations are established as non-profit limited liability organisations. Benefits of incorporation can include tax exemption status, grant eligibility, and registration as a formal entity to interface with governments and other entities.

The rules vary from country to country. Refer to your local law to determine the type of incorporation required, as well as any other applicable regulations and required official forms.

## Draft the statutes

The statutes / bylaws / articles of association or constitution is the governing document of the association, a binding legal document safeguarding the interests of members and establishing internal rules.

It may determine object, powers, membership rules, governance, frequency and voting protocols of general assemblies, composition and mandate of the board of directors, roles (President/Chair, Secretary, Treasurer), finances, and what will happen after dissolution. When drafting the statutes, consider not only what you intend to do in the first year, but also the future development of the association's activities.

[Browse templates from associations around the world.](#)



## Write a business plan

Even if your goal is not to increase profits, you need to be able to run a sustainable organisation. Most trade associations earn income from membership dues, a monthly or annual fee members pay to access the benefits that it provides.

Other revenues may be obtained by running associate membership or partnership programs, providing professional services, organising conferences and events, applying for government grants, negotiating sponsorships, and receiving donations.



WIN associations are eligible to apply for funding opportunities and sponsorships for certain projects.

Ideally, your business plan should cover a period of at least 3 years. Describe how much money your association needs and where to get it. Consider how long it will take to start operations and receive funds. Review it annually to adjust financial projections.

## Register the association

File the statutes and all other required documents with the appropriate state office. Obtain all the necessary licenses and permits and pay fees (if any).

If required, register with your local tax office. Apply for a non-profit tax exemption (if applicable). Even if you are tax-exempt, you may be required to provide information and submit annual financial statements. Get expert advice to ensure that you comply with all your legal and fiscal obligations.

## Assign roles

Create an organisational chart listing committees, officers, and their duties.

New associations usually begin with voluntary contributions from the directors to coordinate and execute operational tasks. However, directors are often the founders or CEOs of companies who likely have a full-time job and may not be able to spend 100% of their time on the association.

Hire a manager to really get the ball rolling. This role can oversee administrative tasks, communications and marketing, create and deliver member services, plan and organise events, research and apply for grants, and build relationships with prospective members.

## Other bodies

IMPALA is the European organisation for independent music companies and national associations. Trade associations established in Europe (including greater Europe) shall be members of IMPALA in order to be eligible for WIN membership.



[www.impalamusic.org/associations](http://www.impalamusic.org/associations)

## Other bodies (cont.)

Merlin is the largest and most trusted international digital music licensing partner for independents. Establishing a trade association helps members maximise their Merlin membership, including reduced administration fee. Moreover, WIN associations are eligible to apply for Merlin's sponsorship program.



[merlinnetwork.org/joining-a-trade-association-helps-members-to-maximize-their-merlin-membership](https://merlinnetwork.org/joining-a-trade-association-helps-members-to-maximize-their-merlin-membership)

## Benefits of WIN membership

As an independent music trade association member of WIN, you will have access to a range of benefits for you and your members.

Find out more  
[winformusic.org/benefits](https://winformusic.org/benefits)



## Apply for membership

- ✓ Are there other colleagues interested in starting a trade association in my country?
- ✓ Have we defined our territorial scope?
- ✓ Have we identified our target members?
- ✓ Have we developed a mission statement?
- ✓ Have we created an action plan?
- ✓ Have we decided on a legal structure?
- ✓ Have we drafted the statutes?
- ✓ Have we written a business plan?
- ✓ Have we registered the association?
- ✓ Have we assigned roles?
- ✓ If we are in Europe, are we a member of IMPALA?



If you answered "yes" to all of the above, you are ready to apply for WIN membership. [Contact us](#) to receive the application form.



If you still have questions, or want to dig deeper into some sections, the [WIN team](#) can provide additional assistance.