

## Guidance for bodies applying for membership of IFN

### Background

The Inter Faith Network for the UK welcomes applications for membership from bodies which believe they meet the eligibility criteria set out in its [Membership Admission Policy](#). The Membership Admission Policy contains some criteria which apply to all bodies, and some which are specific to different categories of membership.

Membership of IFN is an expression of commitment to the work of developing inter faith understanding and cooperation, and brings particular benefits such as meetings to share news and good practice with others in the field. Further information about the benefits of IFN membership can be found on the website at [www.interfaith.org.uk/membership](http://www.interfaith.org.uk/membership).

This guidance is intended to assist organisations applying for IFN membership, and draws on the experience of the Membership Subcommittee in considering past applications as well as feedback from applicants. If applicants have questions or queries not covered by this guidance, they are encouraged to contact the IFN office.

### General information for applicants

Applicants are asked to supply three things as part of their application:

1. A completed and signed application form;
2. A copy of their constitution (or equivalent); and
3. A statement about how they believe that their organisation meets the criteria for eligibility for membership (see below).

As set out in the Membership Admission Policy, applications are first considered by the Membership Subcommittee Membership Subcommittee– a subcommittee of IFN’s Executive Committee (Board of Trustees). They are then considered by the Executive Committee as a whole in the light of advice from the Membership Subcommittee. The Executive Committee then puts applications to the AGM with an accompanying recommendation.

The deadline for submitting applications is normally set at four months in advance of an AGM with the aim of allowing sufficient time for the Membership Subcommittee and the Executive Committee to consider an application. That can include, if necessary, requesting and considering further information. When the date of an AGM is fixed, the date of the deadline will be included on the IFN website and on the application forms.

Applications may, however, be submitted at any time. It is helpful to submit it as far in advance of the deadline as is practical.

<b>NOTE</b>
The 2017 deadline is: 06/03/2017

Expressions of interest and informal inquiries are also welcome.

The Membership Subcommittee has asked the IFN office to check applications for membership as they arrive, and advise applicants where it is believed that any basic information is missing or where the Membership Subcommittee might be likely to require further information. This does not prejudice what the Membership Subcommittee or the Executive Committee may subsequently request.

Application materials may be submitted electronically to [ifnet@interfaith.org.uk](mailto:ifnet@interfaith.org.uk), but the signed application form must then also arrive in hard copy within a week of the original submission. Supporting documents do not need to be provided in hard copy.

## **Application forms**

Application forms for each category can be found on the [IFN website](https://www.interfaith.org.uk/members/about-membership) at <https://www.interfaith.org.uk/members/about-membership> or by clicking the links below:

- [National faith community representative bodies](#)
- [Local inter faith organisations](#)
- [National and regional inter faith organisations](#)
- [Educational and academic bodies](#)

Completed forms should be returned to the IFN office in time to be received before the deadline. Note that applications may be submitted electronically but a hard copy version of the application form, signed by hand, is also required. If you do not receive acknowledgement within two weeks, please follow up with us.

IFN takes care with post received and logs applications received. However, IFN's office is within a shared occupancy office building, and it is recommended that applications are sent by a postal service requiring a signature on delivery.

## **Constitutional documents**

The reference to a constitution in the eligibility criteria refers to the governing documents of the applicant body and not to general doctrinal or creedal documents.

Many bodies applying for IFN membership are either registered charities, registered companies or both. In these cases, what is required is usually a copy of a body's Memorandum and Articles of Association.

Where there may be doubt about what might be suitable, prospective applicants are advised to contact the IFN office. The Membership Subcommittee has in the past considered documents including:

- Constitutions (named as such)
- Memoranda and Articles of Association
- Acts of Parliament
- Documents setting out the 'rules' of an organisation and its internal structures
- Terms of Reference

## **Statement**

Usually, the ‘statement about how the body believes that it meets the criteria for eligibility for membership’ takes the form of a cover letter. What is sought is a statement about how a body believes it meets the criteria, not simply a statement that it believes it meets the criteria. IFN’s Trustees recognise that organisations differ, and approaches may vary. The following guidance is based upon experience of considering previous applications, and assumes that a cover letter format is being used.

#### Structure of statement

- Where possible, please respond to criteria in the order in which they are given within the Membership Admission Policy.

#### Eligibility Criteria

- Include information relating to each of the eligibility criteria – both those which apply to all applicants, and the category-specific criteria.

#### Providing support for your application

- Include any helpful details in support of statements – for example “Our organisation was founded in January 2003” is more helpful than “We confirm we have been in existence for at least two years”.
- It is also helpful if you can refer to particular relevant paragraphs in your constitution or other documents when explaining how you believe your organisation meets the criteria.
- If you send supplementary material relating to the eligibility criteria:
  - It is helpful to point out in the cover letter which items you consider most relevant and to which criteria.
  - If you are referring to your website or other online material, please include links to specific pages you consider to be relevant – applications are usually considered during meetings and print-outs are provided by the IFN office in advance.

#### Category specific

- If you are a **national or regional inter faith organisation** you will see that there are two types of body mentioned. Please identify which type you consider your organisation to be. For example, whether your organisation works nationally (either UK-wide or in any of the four nations) or regionally (eg in the North East of England).
- If you are an **educational or academic body**, you will see that three types of body are set out under criterion i. Please identify which type you consider your organisation to be.
- The criteria for **national and regional inter faith organisations** and **local inter faith organisations** require that bodies show ‘genuine ownership by all the faith communities involved in [their] work...’ There are many different ways in which organisations could potentially show this, and examples which the Membership Subcommittee has considered in the past include: having a requirement that (some) trustees are drawn from different faith community organisations; organisations which have different faith community organisations in membership; organisations having been

founded jointly by different faith community organisations; having an advisory council with members from different faith communities.

- The criteria for **national and regional inter faith organisations** also require that bodies have ‘representation in the governance structure of the main faiths in its area of operation (if multi-lateral) or of the faiths involved (if bi/tri-lateral)...’ Bi/tri-lateral refers to bodies which specifically work with two or three named faith communities, such as Hindu-Christian or Muslim-Jewish-Christian bodies. Multi-lateral refers to bodies which work with people from a wider range of religious backgrounds. Usually, representation in the governance structure will mean a requirement that trustees are drawn from a range of faith backgrounds.
- The criteria for **national and regional inter faith organisations, local inter faith organisations** and **educational and academic bodies** require that bodies demonstrate ‘a track record of regular inter faith activity...’ Examples include the running of events and activities and/or the production of resources across the time of its existence.
- The criteria for **national faith community representative bodies** includes as part of a multi-part criterion the option to demonstrate ‘a commitment to the support of inter faith work.’ As the footnote to this criterion notes, “Some bodies which have thus far been ineligible to apply for IFN membership in this category argue this has impacted on their ability to participate in local, regional or other inter faith organisations/ projects. Therefore, a track record of engagement may not be evident, but a demonstrable commitment to inter faith activity could be, for example, having produced publications encouraging their members to engage in inter faith activity and/ or a record of participation in Inter Faith Week, which is open to all.” Some bodies may find that a doctrinal statement best demonstrates this, and in such circumstances, these materials may be included.

## Timeline

The IFN office aims to confirm receipt of application material within two weeks.

As set out in the Membership Admission Policy and above, applications are first considered by the Membership Subcommittee and then by the Executive Committee. The Executive Committee and Membership Subcommittee meeting dates are usually fixed at the beginning of each year, and take place at intervals. This means that there may sometimes be a time gap between an application being received and progress updates being given to applicants.

Where the Membership Subcommittee or Executive Committee have questions about an application, ask for further information and/ or believe that a meeting with representatives of an applicant body may be helpful, every effort will be made to accommodate this within a timeframe which enables completion of consideration of an application in time for the upcoming AGM. However, this may not always be possible, and in such circumstances the Membership Subcommittee or Executive Committee may discuss with an applicant body the possibility of continuing to consider the application for a further year so that it may be put to the next following AGM.

Applicant bodies will always be informed of the recommendation that the Executive Committee will be making to the general meeting.

Applicant bodies will usually be informed of the outcome of their application within one week of the general meeting.

## Questions and queries

Where an organisation has questions or queries about the application process, or what material to include as part of its application, it is welcome to seek advice from the IFN office.

## Glossary of terms

- **Bi-lateral** – working to promote dialogue/ engagement between two specific faith communities (or people from two specific faith backgrounds), such as Hindu and Buddhist.
- **Categories; Categories of membership** – the four categories of IFN membership: national faith community representative bodies; national and regional inter faith organisations; local inter faith organisations; educational and academic bodies
- **Constitution** – the governing document(s) of an organisation
- **Criteria; eligibility criteria** – the formal list of requirements which applicant bodies must meet in order to be eligible to apply for IFN membership. Set out in the Membership Admission Policy and on application forms.
- **Executive Committee** – the name of IFN’s Board of Directors/ Board of Trustees
- **Membership Admission Policy** - the Policy adopted by IFN member bodies at its 2014 EGM which sets out the application process and the eligibility criteria (and can be found at [www.interfaith.org.uk/membership](http://www.interfaith.org.uk/membership))
- **Membership Subcommittee**– a subcommittee of IFN’s Executive Committee which has functions relating to membership matters
- **Multi-lateral** – working to promote dialogue/ engagement between a wide range of faith communities (or people from a wide range of faith communities), whether specified or not.
- **National** – refers to either the UK as a whole or any of its constituent nations (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales).
- **Regional** – refers to any area larger than a county within any of the constituent nations of the UK
- **Tri-lateral** – working to promote dialogue/ engagement between three specific faith communities (or people from three specific faith backgrounds).