

Membership Policy

Northern Area Community Network (NACN)

1. Purpose of the Policy

This policy outlines the criteria, responsibilities and processes relating to membership of Northern Area Community Network (NACN).

NACN is a network of community and voluntary organisations working across the Northern area. Our membership reflects the diversity of the communities we serve and our members may have different religious, cultural, political, philosophical, historical or community identities and interests.

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that membership is inclusive, fair, consistent and aligned with NACN's role as a network supporting and strengthening grassroots community and voluntary organisations.

NACN believes that organisations do not need to be the same in order to work together. Membership provides an opportunity for organisations to connect, share experience, have a voice, influence discussions and contribute to the development of their communities.

Membership of NACN does not require an organisation to change, surrender or compromise its own lawful identity, beliefs, traditions, affiliations or community interests.

At the same time, membership requires organisations to participate respectfully, operate within the law and respect the rights and dignity of others.

2. Who Can Become a Member?

Membership is open to organisations that meet the following criteria:

- Are non-profit-taking and operate on a voluntary or community basis.
- Are based in or primarily operate within:
 - Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council
 - Mid & East Antrim Borough Council
 - Antrim & Newtownabbey Borough Council
- Deliver activities or services that support community development, social inclusion or local wellbeing.
- Are not affiliated to, controlled by or acting on behalf of a political party.
- Operate lawfully and do not engage in unlawful discrimination, harassment or victimisation.
- Do not use their membership of NACN to promote unlawful discrimination or to prevent other members from participating fully in the network.

NACN will consider an organisation's purpose, activities and conduct when assessing membership rather than making assumptions about the organisation based solely on its name, identity, affiliation or community background.

Regional or national organisations may be considered for membership where they have a clear, ongoing and demonstrable presence or delivery of services within the NACN catchment area.

Such organisations must:

- Operate on a non-profit basis and be consistent with the purpose of NACN.
- Show evidence of active community work within the area.
- Acknowledge that NACN's priority is to support grassroots, community-led initiatives.

3. What Membership of NACN Means

NACN is a shared network made up of organisations with different experiences, identities and perspectives.

By becoming a member, an organisation has the opportunity to:

- Connect with other community and voluntary organisations.
- Share knowledge, experience and good practice.
- Contribute to consultations and discussions.
- Raise issues affecting their communities.
- Have a voice and contribute to the development of the network.
- Access information, resources, training and opportunities provided through NACN.

Membership does not mean that members are required to agree with one another, adopt the same beliefs or hold the same views.

Membership also does not require an organisation to change or give up its own identity, beliefs, traditions, affiliations or lawful community interests.

NACN recognises that healthy community development can involve different perspectives and experiences. Members are expected to respect those differences and allow others the same opportunity to participate.

Membership of NACN does not give an organisation the right to speak on behalf of NACN unless expressly authorised to do so.

4. Membership and Political Activity

NACN is independent of political parties and does not support or promote any political party.

Members must not represent themselves as acting on behalf of NACN in political or other public activity unless they have been expressly authorised to do so.

The requirement for NACN to remain non-partisan does not prevent member organisations from:

- Holding their own political opinions.
- Representing the interests of their communities.
- Raising issues with elected representatives or public bodies.
- Participating in lawful public debate or consultation.

- Supporting or campaigning on community issues in accordance with their own purposes and responsibilities.

Members remain responsible for ensuring that their own activities comply with applicable law and the requirements of their own governing documents and funders.

5. Diversity, Equality and Respect

NACN welcomes membership from organisations reflecting the diversity of the communities across the Northern area.

Members may have different religious, cultural, political, philosophical, historical or community identities. Such differences are not, in themselves, a barrier to membership.

NACN expects all members to:

- Respect the dignity and rights of others.
- Participate in the network in a respectful and constructive manner.
- Comply with applicable equality and other relevant legislation.
- Not engage in unlawful discrimination, harassment or victimisation.
- Not seek to prevent another member from participating in NACN because of their identity, beliefs, background or lawful community interests.

NACN will consider concerns about a member's conduct based on the evidence available and the organisation's actual activities or behaviour. NACN will not make assumptions about an organisation based solely on its identity, name, religious or cultural affiliation, political opinion or community background.

6. Membership Application Process

Organisations wishing to become members of NACN will complete a membership application form confirming that they meet the membership criteria.

NACN staff may request additional information or clarification where this is reasonably required to establish eligibility.

Applications will be assessed against the published membership criteria.

Where an application raises concerns about eligibility, NACN may seek further information from the organisation before making a decision.

NACN reserves the right to refuse membership where an organisation does not meet the membership criteria.

Where membership is refused, the organisation will be informed of the reason for the decision and will have an opportunity to request a review of the decision.

7. Member Responsibilities

By becoming a member, organisations agree to:

- Respect the purpose and values of NACN when participating in the network.
- Maintain accurate and up-to-date contact information.

- Respond to NACN communications and consultations where relevant.
- Participate in network activities in a respectful and constructive manner.
- Operate lawfully and comply with relevant legal and regulatory requirements.
- Not bring NACN into disrepute through conduct carried out on behalf of NACN or represented as being connected with NACN.
- Not represent their own views or activities as those of NACN unless authorised to do so.
- Use NACN resources responsibly.
- Not copy or distribute members-only resources outside the network without agreement.

NACN shares new ideas, approaches and resources with members to strengthen local groups and support innovation. Members are expected to respect the purpose for which these resources are provided.

Members are not required to agree with NACN or with other members on every issue. Respectful disagreement and different perspectives are recognised as part of a diverse network.

8. Concerns, Suspension or Termination of Membership

NACN reserves the right to review, suspend or terminate membership where there is evidence that:

- An organisation no longer meets the eligibility criteria.
- An organisation has engaged in unlawful discrimination, harassment or victimisation.
- An organisation has engaged in serious harmful or unlawful conduct relevant to its membership of NACN.
- An organisation has seriously or repeatedly breached the responsibilities of membership.
- An organisation has misrepresented itself as speaking or acting on behalf of NACN without authorisation.

A difference in religious, cultural, political, philosophical or community identity or a disagreement with NACN or another member, will not in itself be grounds for suspension or termination.

Where a concern is raised, NACN will consider the specific circumstances and available evidence.

Except where immediate action is reasonably necessary to protect people, the organisation will be informed of the concern in writing and given a reasonable opportunity to respond before a final decision is made.

Any decision to suspend or terminate membership will be proportionate to the circumstances and communicated to the organisation in writing.

9. Appeals Process

If NACN decides to refuse, suspend or terminate an organisation's membership, the organisation will be notified in writing and provided with the reasons for the decision.

The organisation may submit a written appeal within 21 days of receiving the notification.

Appeals will be reviewed by an appeals panel made up of Board representatives and/or staff who were not involved in the original decision.

The panel will consider the information provided and may request further clarification or supporting information from the organisation or NACN.

A final decision will be issued in writing within 28 days of the appeal being received, where reasonably practicable.

The outcome of the appeal will be final.

10. Membership Review and Renewal

Membership records will be reviewed every three years to ensure that information remains accurate and up to date.

Members may be asked to confirm their continued eligibility and commitment to the responsibilities of membership.

NACN may also review individual memberships where there is a significant change in an organisation's purpose, activities or circumstances, or where concerns are raised about continued eligibility.

Our Values – Northern Area Community Network

NACN is committed to inclusive, community-led development.

Our values guide how NACN operates and how we seek to work together as a network.

Grassroots Empowerment

Supporting local people and communities to identify priorities and lead positive change in their own communities.

Inclusivity

Welcoming and respecting people and organisations from different backgrounds, identities, beliefs and experiences.

Collaboration

Working together, sharing resources, ideas and solutions; and recognising the contribution that different organisations can make.

Integrity

Being transparent, fair and accountable in the way we operate and make decisions.

Respect

Valuing diversity, treating people with dignity and allowing space for different perspectives and identities.

Non-Partisanship

Remaining independent from political parties and focusing on community development and community benefit.

Our approach to membership

NACN recognises that our members will not all have the same identities, beliefs, traditions or perspectives.

Our aim is not to make member organisations the same. Our aim is to provide a network in which different organisations can participate, have a voice, share experience and work together for the benefit of their communities.

By joining NACN, members agree to respect these principles when participating in the network and to operate lawfully and respectfully.

Membership does not require an organisation to adopt NACN's values in place of its own identity, beliefs, traditions or lawful community interests.

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