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Organization & Governance

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American Inns of Court are designed to improve the skills, professionalism and ethics of the bench and bar. An American Inn of Court is an amalgam of judges, lawyers, and in some cases, law professors and law students. Each Inn meets approximately once a month both to "break bread" and to hold programs and discussions on matters of ethics, skills and professionalism.

Looking for a new way to help lawyers and judges rise to higher levels of excellence, professionalism, and ethical awareness, the American Inns of Court adopted the traditional English model of legal apprenticeship and modified it to fit the particular needs of the American legal system. American Inns of Court help lawyers to become more effective advocates and counselors with a keener ethical awareness. Members learn side-by-side with the most experienced judges and attorneys in their community.

As a new Inn leader you understand the importance of our mission and what it means to be a member of an Inn of Court. In this module, we will walk you through the organizational and governing responsibilities for your local Inn of Court. More information on Inn administration and management, as well as effective Inn leadership procedures and strategies can be found in those related resource modules.

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Organization & Governing Documents

- 501(c)3 non-profit -- tax exempt
- Organizational Charter
- Local Inn Bylaws
- Policies & Procedures
 - Membership
 - Mentorship
 - Programming
 - Meetings & activities
 - Dues structure & payment

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Let's start by discussing the organization and its governing documents. The American Inns of Court is a 501 (c) 3 non-profit organization which is a IRS tax exempt status. A local inn of court can join this group exemption and therefore provide a tax deduction for your members as well as tax benefits to the Inn. There is much more information about taxes in the Essential Financial Concerns-Financial Policies & Tax Issues module.

An Inn is governed overall by two documents:

First, the Charter which your Inn applied for and was granted from the national foundation when the Inn first organized. The Charter is written guidelines from the American Inns of Court Foundation that set a strong foundation for the local Inn to operate which are consistent with the American Inns of Court Foundation Articles of Incorporation, Bylaws and polices, and they cover the basic areas of the Inn organization: Objectives; Organization, including governing body and officers; Membership; Finances; Meetings and activities; and Pupillage groups.

Second, the local Inn bylaws are a written organizational structure by which the Inn is administered. This document outlines: Organizational structure; Membership; Meetings and attendance; Voting and Elections; Fiscal Matters; and Adoption and Amendments.

Besides local Inn Bylaws, your Inn should have or develop policies and procedures for: Membership-- including member rotation, recruitment, and an attendance policy; Mentorship; Programming; Meetings and Activities; and Due Structure and payments.

More information on these topics can be found in the related resources section of this module.

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Governance Structure

- Masters of the Bench -- "Benchers"
 - Adopt local bylaws
 - Determine leadership positions
 - Determine election process
- Executive Committee / Inn Leadership
 - Officers
 - Committee Chairs

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In keeping with the tradition established by the English Inns of Court, the ultimate authority in each American Inn of Court rests with the Masters of the Bench. The Masters of the Bench or Benchers as they are sometimes called, determine the policies of the Inn in order to accomplish its purpose as set forth in the Inn's Charter.

The executive committee and/or Inn leadership exercise the authority of the Benchers between Masters of the Bench meetings.

The Masters of the Bench should:

- Adopt local By-laws to document procedures for the Inn
- Determine the leadership positions
- Determine the election process

We discuss officer roles and responsibilities, committees, and elections in detail in the Effective Inn Leadership module.

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Local Inn Calendar

- July - New Inn Year Begins!
 - Demographic and leadership information due
 - New member selection
 - Pupillage team assignments
- August
 - Program committee assigns topics
 - Executive Committee plans first meeting

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In order for an Inn to be part of the American Inns of Court Foundation's 501(c)(3) Group Tax Exemption, the Inn's fiscal year must coincide with the Foundation's fiscal year, which is July 1 to June 30. Keeping this timeframe in mind, a calendar of significant events should be followed. A detailed sample calendar can be found in the related resources for this module, and the most significant events are as follows:

July-New Inn Year Begins!

- Submit updated demographic and leadership information to the national office
- Masters meet to vote on new members and assign pupillage teams

August

- Program Committee meets to assign program topics
- Executive Committee meets to plan first meeting

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Local Inn Calendar

- September
 - Conduct new member orientation
 - Hold first Inn meeting
 - Collect dues from members
- October
 - Hold first program meeting
 - Update membership roster

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September

- Conduct new member orientation
- Hold first Inn meeting
- Collect dues from members

October

- Hold first program meeting
- Make sure the national office has updated membership information for your Inn

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Local Inn Calendar

- November and December
 - Hold second program meeting
 - Submit programs to national
- January, February, March and April
 - Hold programs and submit them

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November and December

- Hold second program meeting
- Submit first two Inn programs to national office for program library and award consideration

January, February, March and April

- Hold program meetings and, if original, submit programs to national office

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Local Inn Calendar

- May
 - Elect new leadership for next Inn year
- June
 - Hold closing dinner
 - Membership renewal forms due
 - Elect leaders, if not already done

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May

- Hold seventh program meeting and elect new leadership for next Inn year, if not already done

June

- Hold closing dinner meeting, usually no program is presented
- Collect membership forms from members that will continue next year. Membership Committee meets to review membership forms, determine openings and prepare new member recommendations from waiting list or applications
- Elect leaders for next Inn year if not already done

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Your Inn and the AICF national office: A Partnership for Success

- Ensuring vitality and continuity of local Inns
 - Assist new Inns
 - Ongoing support to existing Inns
 - Enhance individual's experience

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Through your activity as an Inn leader you have a first-hand understanding of how the mission of the American Inns of Court Foundation is carried out in the local arena by each Inn. What you may not realize is how the national Foundation has realigned and redefined goal two of our strategic plan to serve as more of a partner in your local Inn movement. Simply stated, it says "to help ensure the vitality and continuity of local Inns."

The objectives for this goal are to:

- Assist new Inns in establishing themselves;
- Provide ongoing support to existing Inns; and
- Enhance the individual membership experience.

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Your Inn and the AICF national office: A Partnership for Success

- Support Products or Services
 - Leadership learning community
 - Program library
 - Chapter Management System
 - InnSight
 - The Bencher
 - Web site and listserv hosting
 - English and Irish Inns visitation
 - Online national membership directory

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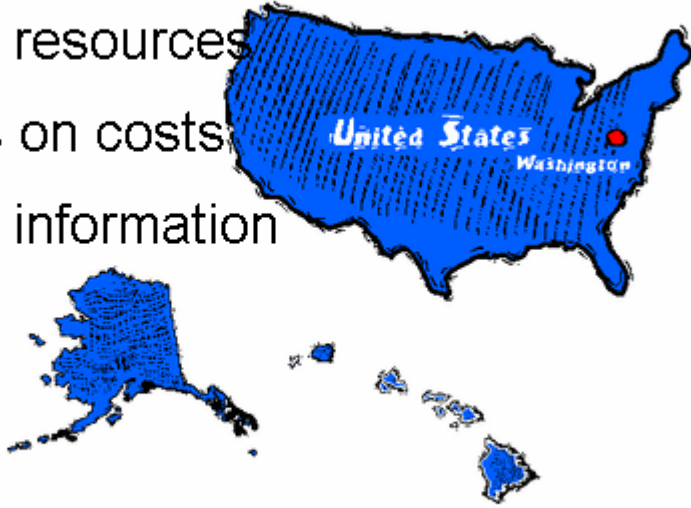
Providing ongoing support to existing Inns is made available through the work of the Regional Directors of Chapter Relations, as well as through the following products or services that are available to your Inn:

- Leadership learning community;
- Program library;
- Chapter Management System, an online Inn administration tool;
- InnSight, a monthly electronic newsletter for Inn leaders;
- The Bencher;
- Web site and listserv hosting for Inns;
- Reciprocal visitation privileges with English and Irish Inns; and
- An online national membership directory.

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Inn to Inn Support

- Sharing resources
- Savings on costs
- Sharing information



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This national partnership also supports local, regional and specialty area Inn-to-Inn relationship building. As we are all part of a community of over 350 Inns from every corner of this country and London, England, we have a responsibility to support each other as well as progress “the Inn Movement.” Sharing our ideas, experiences, and knowledge is critical to our overall success and growth.

It is highly recommended that Inns within a close proximity of each other come together periodically to hold joint meetings, either independently or in conjunction with a state or local bar meeting. Joint meetings help your members feel connected to the broader movement, making their involvement in the Inn feel that much more worthwhile.

In many cases, there is at least one other Inn of Court in the same city or county as your Inn, or you can also find a partner Inn who shares your specialty. It is beneficial for there to be strong channels of communication between or among inns.

Some benefits can include:

- Sharing resources, such as administrative support or membership waiting lists or even just program ideas specific to your local area or specialty;
- Saving money by coordination of efforts, such as jointly contracting with a caterer or restaurant or joining member recruitment efforts; and
- Sharing questions, answers, challenges and best practices to find ways to help each Inn grow stronger and successful.