



A GUIDE FOR ESTABLISHING STATE WIRELESS ASSOCIATIONS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTION	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	i
THE NEED FOR STATE WIRELESS ASSOCIATIONS	ii
GETTING STARTED	iii
INCORPORATION, BANK ACCOUNT, BY-LAWS, MISSION STATEMENT	vi
BOARD MEMBERS	vii
OFFICERS	viii
COMMITTEES	ix
WEBMASTER	x
MEETINGS & EVENTS	x
CONTACTS	xii

INTRODUCTION

This guide is designed for anyone who is interested in forming an association that represents the broad interests of the wireless industry within a given state – from carriers to equipment vendors, from network consultants to construction companies, tower companies, and others.

The suggestions offered herein are based on the experience of existing state associations. The members of those associations collectively hope their experience will prove helpful to others and underscore ...

- the value of such associations
- the relative ease with which they can be created and sustained
- the crucial role they can play in helping ensure the continued growth and development of the wireless industry

For additional insights and suggestions beyond the contents of this guide, readers should feel free to contact Janet Gill at PCIA or any member of the SWAP Executive Committee as listed on the last page.

THE NEED FOR STATE WIRELESS ASSOCIATIONS

As documented in countless news reports - in both mainstream press and trade publications - the wireless industry is faced with a growing number of state-level regulatory challenges. Those challenges are not limited to one or two states, but are evolving on many different fronts and throughout the country. That reality alone suggests the time is ripe for our industry to organize and deploy a united front within *each* of the 50 states where we operate.

Beyond the threat of unnecessary or damaging regulation, there are other reasons to consider forming State Wireless Associations. Just as politics are local, so is the business of our industry. Prior to the formation of the existing associations, there were few, and in some cases *no*, reliable state-level resources that provided a network for communication within the state. State associations fill that void - by helping their members fight regulatory threats *and* making the crucial connections they need to advance their mutual business goals.

GETTING STARTED

While forming and maintaining a State Wireless Association (SWA) require some work, it's much easier than most people realize. Below is a list of seven primary steps to get started.

1. **Identify potential charter members.** In the earliest stages of establishing a SWA, two or more people with strong enthusiasm for the concept will typically meet to discuss their vision and identify others who may want to become involved. Those identified should have similar interests and, by virtue of their talents and current positions in the industry, help drive the SWA's formation. Then, the initial, two or more people reach out to the others identified to establish a larger working group of charter members.
2. **Conduct a planning meeting with charter members.** Once the working group of charter members has been identified, contacted, and agreed to help, they should come together at a mutually convenient time and place to ...
 - Discuss officer positions (see page [viii](#) of this guide) and who will fill these positions
 - Discuss who will act as Board members (See page [vii](#) of this guide)
 - Establish a list of core committees (see page [ix](#) of this guide) and identify committee co-chairs (two per committee)
 - Assign lead responsibility for Step #4, below
3. Conduct an initial Board meeting and adopt resolutions naming Board members and others.
4. **Develop a mission statement and by-laws; file for incorporation; establish a bank account.** A mission statement and set of by-laws are critical components to the effective operation of a SWA. Incorporating with the state, provides your SWA with a heightened level of legitimacy among its members, public officials, news media, and other audiences. While existing SWA's do not collect membership

dues, a bank account is necessary to collect donations/sponsorships and disburse funds to pay for events and meeting facilities, and worthwhile causes. For more information about how to efficiently complete this series of steps, see the related section of this guide on page [vi](#).

- Agree to a date, time, and place for the first general (or “kick-off”) meeting of the SWA – as discussed in Step #5 and Step #6.
5. **“Launch” the association.** Critical to this step is the development of a broad list of potential members. The officers and other charter members of your association should be asked to contribute to that list by submitting – to the Membership Committee co-chairs – names of and contact information for employees, suppliers, and others whom they believe will find value in the SWA and be interested in participating. After compiling all submitted names and contact information into a master directory or database, the Membership Committee co-chairs should e-mail each person listed: (a) introducing the SWA; (b) describing its purpose, goals, officers, and committees; and (c) asking all recipients to RSVP their interest in attending the kick-off meeting described in Step #7.
 6. **Create and launch a Web site.** A simple but dynamic Web site will help reinforce broad awareness of your organization and give you a valuable way to communicate with members and other key audiences. Ultimately, your Web Master may want to review other SWA sites for ideas on structure, design, and content.
 7. **Conduct a kick-off meeting for all interested members.** We suggest you organize this meeting along the same lines as the quarterly meetings described in the “Meetings & Events” section of this guide (page [x](#)) – including: (a) time for networking; (b) an in-depth discussion of the mission, purpose and goals of the new SWA; and (c) an introduction of the Officers, Board and Committee co-chairs and the goals of each committee explained. Additional volunteers to serve on the committees should be solicited, asking them to complete sign up sheets, placed on each table.

While you will likely identify other steps during the process of forming your SWA, these seven steps will provide the basis for building an effective organization.

For additional suggestions on how to sustain your efforts, see the subsequent pages of this guide, notably, the sections on “Committees” (page ix) and “Meetings & Events” (page x).

Finally – at some point after Step #6 – your leaders should consider (with input from the PR Committee co-chairs) an appropriate plan for announcing the formation of your SWA to a broader audience, including a news release to local and national publications.

INCORPORATION, BANK ACCOUNT, BY-LAWS, MISSION STATEMENT

An attorney is needed to incorporate your organization and to obtain status under the Internal Revenue Code as a 501(c)(6) trade association, consistent with applicable laws. This attorney, licensed to practice law in your state, will ideally be one of your charter members, or an attorney from one of the companies represented by your charter members. (Association leaders in other states have found that attorneys are often among the first individuals to join and take active roles in state wireless groups because they recognize how collaborative efforts at the state level can help advance the industry's mutual interests.) In conjunction with filing for incorporation, the SWA attorney can also establish a bank account – usually a checking account – for the association.

By-laws shall be adopted by the Board. They will establish procedures and guidelines for operating the SWA. The by-laws for the Tennessee, Alabama, and Georgia Wireless Associations are available as models, to help streamline the process of developing your own. Please visit www.swaprogram.net and follow the links to download copies of these by-laws in PDF format.

The mission statement should be featured on the association's Website and in other communication pieces. The following template closely reflects the mission statements of existing State Wireless Associations and can be used as a starting point for your organization's own mission statement:

The **{State Name}** Wireless Association is comprised of members of all sectors of the wireless industry. These individuals are committed to educating customers and public officials about our industry and the critical role it plays in **{State Name}**. Our goal is to cultivate relationships between the various members of the industry and the local communities they serve to help ensure the continued growth and development of our industry.

BOARD MEMBERS

Typically, under the governing state law of a SWA, Board members are responsible for guiding and operating the organization. There are often legal requirements identifying a minimum (and sometime maximum) number of Board members. Each Board member has a fiduciary obligation to carry out the purposes of the organization in accordance with applicable law. The SWA attorney should be consulted to provide advice on what the requirements, limitations and rules are in the state.

The Board should consider providing for “Directors and Officers” liability insurance to cover claims against the Board members and officers. The SWA attorney and/or a licensed insurance broker should be consulted on this.

OFFICERS

The by-laws will typically set forth officer positions for the SWA. The officers of the Association perform their duties on a volunteer basis. We recommend you consider a minimum of four officer positions to operate the day-to-day functions:

1. **President** – helps organize and coordinate membership and board meetings; chairs all meetings; acts as the primary public spokesperson for the Association.
2. **Vice President** – directly assists the President with his/her duties and chairs meetings when the President is not available.
3. **Secretary** – records the minutes of each meeting; provides copies of these minutes to the membership and reviews them at each subsequent meeting; helps coordinate special events.
4. **Treasurer** – maintains bank account and financial records for the SWA; completes requisite tax filings (if necessary); and allocates and disburses funds as approved by the Board.

COMMITTEES

Existing State Wireless Associations have generally established three core committees, each with two co-chairs:

1. **Membership/Social:** The role of this Committee is to improve communications and contacts between companies, individuals, and sectors within the state's wireless industry. Ideally, this Committee should create and maintain a membership directory/database; recruit new members; schedule meetings and events; work with the PR Committee to inform members of those events; etc.
2. **Regulatory:** The role of this Committee is to monitor, shape, and impact regulatory and legislative issues on a local, regional, and state level. Responsibilities may include organizing discussions with planning, zoning, and other governmental officials; organizing grassroots efforts to shape public officials' opinions; providing updates on wireless regulation and legislation to the Association Web Master, for publication on the Web site; etc.
3. **Public Relations:** The role of this Committee is to promote positive awareness of the wireless industry to communities, public officials, homeowners' groups, and others. Its primary responsibilities include the development and delivery of presentations about the benefits of the wireless industry within the state; plus general media relations activities, including but not limited to publicizing the Association's charitable activities and providing information to journalists regarding the Association's positions on regulatory and/or legislative issues.

While these committees are key to the initial operation of a State Wireless Association, your members may decide to form additional committees. For instance, the Tennessee SWA established a Homeland Security Committee, while the Georgia SWA established an Education Committee. Additionally, the Alabama and Georgia SWAs each created a Steering Committee. Comprised exclusively of carrier representatives, this Steering Committee shapes the strategic direction or long-term vision of the SWA and the committee members individually support the SWA by promoting it within their respective companies, encouraging employee involvement/participation, etc.

WEBMASTER

The Webmaster is responsible for the design and implementation of a website for the SWA. The Webmaster should work closely with the officers and committee co-chairs to help design and maintain the site.

MEETINGS & EVENTS

Generally, the existing State Wireless Associations conduct membership and/or board meetings on a quarterly basis and support at least one annual event.

Quarterly Meetings are typically held during lunchtime, with each member paying for his or her own lunch. The venues for these meetings vary, but are often conducted at restaurants, hotels, or country clubs, where one or more members has an existing relationship and the venue's management team agrees to waive conference room fees in exchange for regular meetings with associated food and beverage purchases. The agenda for these meetings generally includes:

- Networking Time – which is usually conducted just before or during lunch
- Guest Presentation – from a pioneer in the development of the wireless industry, a government official, a CEO or other senior executive from one of the member companies, etc.
- Business Discussion – during which officers and committee co-chairs update members on the association's key accomplishments during the last quarter and its plans for the next quarter.
- Information Sharing – during which members compare notes and best practices on how they are addressing key state and local issues, and identify where they might need help from other members.

Annual Events are generally member-sponsored occasions, ranging from golf tournaments to holiday socials, designed to help the Association raise funds for a worthwhile charitable cause with a statewide presence. In the past, State Wireless Associations have selected, as beneficiaries of their charitable efforts, organizations supporting terminally ill children, food banks, cancer treatment/research centers, etc. Clearly, these events require more detailed planning than do quarterly meetings, and thus, should involve the active support of all Association committees and officers. (Please visit www.swaprogram.net and follow the links to view samples of promotional fliers created and distributed by other Associations to promote their annual events.)

The SWA Board should consider whether liability insurance is available and appropriate to protect the SWA against claims in connection with SWA events. Insurance may be available for a single event or annually for all events.

CONTACTS

Listed below are the national SWAP Executive Committee members. This group of industry and state wireless veterans will serve as informational resources to your group, as you work to set up your own State Wireless Association.

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