

Civic activity and associations

Civic activity is voluntary activity for the benefit of the community. Participation in civic activity is everyone's personal choice, based on one's interests. By participating in civic activity, you can learn and engage in many things together with other people, help your community's conditions or have an effect on social issues.

Everyone in Finland has the right and opportunity to promote and pursue issues they find interesting and important. When a person or group of people notice something in their lives or environment to which "something has to be done", that's when civic activity kicks in, and you start looking for ways to make a change. One good way is to contact an association that already deals with the matter. An association means a group of people who want to work together for a common goal. If no suitable association exists, you can also start a new one.

Doing things together for a common cause

By civic activity, you often mean the things people do in various associations and organisations. An association and an organisation are basically the same thing. Often you use the word organisation when you talk about a larger or nationwide association. Finland has more than 100,000 registered associations for a range of purposes, such as social welfare and health associations, residents' associations, village associations, exercise, sports and youth associations, cultural and pensioners' associations and a range of associations related to hobbies and leisure-time activities. Political parties and religious communities are associations, too. Associations can be local, regional, national or international. An association can be established in order to work towards a common goal, as long as it is not inappropriate in any way and does not break any laws. A minimum of three persons are required to establish an association. In order to establish and maintain an association, you must be familiar with and take care of certain formalities. The establishment, decision-making, administration and dissolving related to a registered association are subject to the conditions of the Associations Act. Otherwise the association and its members decide about the activities among themselves within their own rules. An association is an official, legal entity that can, for example, apply for funding to support its activities. It is also responsible for its actions.

The articles of association explain the purpose for which the association was established. People belonging to an association are called members. A person who accepts the association's purpose may join the association. An association may decide who it accepts as a member. Many associations also organise events in which you can become a member. Joining an association is voluntary, and nobody can be forced to join any association. If you want to join an association, let them know that you are interested in joining. In Finland, freedom of assembly and freedom of association are included in the Finnish Constitution, and people's right to join various associations is not limited as long as the association is not doing anything illegal. An association may have an annual membership fee. Some associations have various benefits they offer their members. There is plenty of information on the Internet about establishing and running an association.

Why join an association?

Associations organise a range of activities to their members. Often they also organise activities that can be participated in by non-members, such as events for local residents, various other events or, for example, sports club activities for young people. Participants are brought together by a joint interest in a subject. For many people, simply being together with other people is important. Associations also offer a good opportunity to meet new people, to have something interesting to do and to learn new skills. It may also be possible to affect things in a larger context. Associations also offer jobs to people. Indeed, associations and organisations play an important role in society: there have been associations in Finland already for 160

years, and associations carry out a lot of important work for society in general and for people's wellbeing. By joining an association, you can help to build a better society!

Sources and additional information:

<http://www.demokratia.fi/tietotori/kansalaistoiminta/>

https://www.kansalaisyhteiskunta.fi/civil_society

<https://www.toimeksi.fi/tietoa-palvelusta/shortly-in-english/>

About associations in simplified Finnish: <https://selko.fi/yhdistystoiminta/>

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