UNITED ARAB EMIRATES
MINISTRY OF COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

The Guideline for Establishing Non-Profit Organizations

From Idea to Establishment

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Executive Summary

The guideline for establishing non-profit organizations **(from licensing to achieving impact)** serves as a **regulatory and enabling tool aimed at unifying the understanding of the non-profit organization ecosystem in the UAE,** facilitating the establishment process, and enhancing the readiness of these organizations from their earliest stages, thereby cementing their sustainability and amplifying their societal impact.

The guideline focuses on transitioning community work **from individual initiatives to organized institutional work** through a clear legislative framework and effective alignment with national priorities, in line with the "We Are the UAE 2031" vision and the UAE Centennial 2071, which placing people at the heart of development and promote the concept of community partnership.

- **The guideline provides a simplified and comprehensive overview of:**

The legal framework governing non-profit organizations and the relevant authorities.

The types of authorized non-profit organizations and their scope of work.

The steps and procedures for establishment and the bylaws requirements.

The general guidelines and strategic priorities that govern the sector.

Frequently asked questions that address the most prominent challenges and recurring customers' inquiries.

- **This guideline contributes to:**

- Reducing discrepancies in understanding regulatory requirements.
- Accelerating the establishment of non-profit organizations and improving the quality of applications.
- Enhancing compliance and transparency.
- Enabling non-profit organizations to play their role as active partners in the community development system.

This guideline serves as a supporting reference for UAE's efforts to build a strong and sustainable non-profit organizations sector capable of amplifying social impact, strengthening social cohesion, and establishing a culture of institutional giving.

The UAE's Ecosystem of Non-Profit Organizations

“A strong society is not built by decisions alone, but by participation, responsibility, and giving.”

Since the founding of the United Arab Emirates, community work has been a fundamental pillar of its development. This approach is rooted in the enduring values set forth by the Founding Father, the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, who believed that the strength of the nation lies in the cohesion of its society and the integration of the roles of its individuals and institutions.
Building on this vision, community work in the UAE has evolved from individual initiatives and scattered volunteer efforts into a comprehensive institutionalized system known today as the system of non-profit organizations. This system structures charitable giving, channels the spirit of genericity into sustainable impact, and enables community participation with a clear framework defined by sound governance, and measurable objectives.

- **From individual initiatives to sustainable institutional work:**

Non-profit organizations have evolved beyond the traditional role of providing aid or implementing standalone activities; they have become active development partners contributing to:

1. Strengthening social cohesion
2. Empowering diverse segments of society
3. Supporting national policies
4. Anticipating future societal needs

This transformation takes place within an advanced legislative and regulatory environment in UAE, which ensures transparency, accountability, and sound resource management, reflecting the growing maturity of the NPOs

- **Community Engagement as a Value and National Identity**

Within the UAE, community engagement is not viewed as a transient concept, but rather as a deeply rooted national value; a value that is reflected in:

- Community-led initiatives
- Structured volunteer work
- Partnerships across the public, private, and NPOs sectors
- NPOs operating with a strong sense of responsibility and commitment.

This approach is grounded in a firm belief that every individual is capable of contributing, and that every organization has the potential to make a difference, when supported by the right tools, an enabling environment and a robust institutional framework.

A system that grows with society... and for society
The non-profit organizations system in the UAE is not a static framework, but a dynamic and evolving ecosystem. It develops in line with societal progress, responds to emerging challenges and opportunities, and aligns with the national priorities, in accordance with the UAE Centennial 2071, which places people at the heart of development and reinforces the concept of community partnership as a pathway to the future.
Through this system, giving is transformed into institutional practice, initiatives are translated into impact, and participation becomes shared responsibility, contributing to the development of a cohesive, conscious, and sustainable society.

What is the Guideline for Establishing Non-Profit Organizations?

The Guideline for Establishing Non-Profit Organizations serves as a practical and user-friendly reference that guides applicants step by step through their journey from concept to an officially established organization. It explains what non-profit organizations are, the approved legal forms in the UAE, and the sectors in which they operate. It also provides clear guidance on key establishment requirements, such as selecting the appropriate legal structure, drafting the bylaws, defining the organizational structure, and setting criteria for selecting members or founders.

The guideline further outlines the application process through approved digital platforms, clarifying what is expected from applicants at each stage in a simple and accessible manner. This helps streamline procedures, provide clarity, and accelerate the establishment process, ultimately enabling the creation of effective organizations that contribute to community and deliver sustainable impact.

Objectives of the Guideline

The guideline aims to:

- Standardize understanding of the non-profit organizations ecosystem in the UAE and enhance awareness of its roles and responsibilities.
- Enable individuals interested in establishing non-profit organizations to make informed decisions from the idea stage.
- Simplify establishment procedures and clearly explain regulatory and legislative requirements.
- Support compliance and governance from the early stages of establishing non-profit organizations.
- Enhance the readiness of non-profit organizations to achieve sustainable social impact aligned with national priorities.

Target Audience

This guideline is intended for:

- Individuals seeking to establish non-profit organizations.
- Founders and board members or trustees of non-profit organizations.
- Entities and institutions interested in establishing social solidarity funds.
- Partner entities from the government, private sector, and the non-profit organizations sector.
- Professionals and individuals interested in community and institutional work.

General Principles Governing the Work of Non-Profit Organizations in the UAE

Non-profit organizations in the UAE **operate in alignment with national priorities and strategic directions,** ensuring the integration of their roles within the broader social development ecosystem. This alignment strengthens their social impact and enhances their contribution as active partners in achieving national visions and building a cohesive and sustainable society.

These principles are based on three main pillars that form the reference framework for the work of non-profit organizations:

- UAE National Priorities (including the “We the UAE 2031” Vision and the UAE Centennial 2071)
- Government legislation and policies
- Government service strategies and digital transformation

Strategic Priorities of Non-Profit Organizations

- Promote structured community participation and transform individual initiatives into sustainable institutional work.
- Achieve measurable social impact and link efforts to outputs and outcomes.
- Support national values and strengthen social cohesion.
- Align with state policies and priorities while avoiding duplication of efforts.
- Build sustainable organizations capable of developing partnerships across the government, private, and non-profit organizations sectors.

Legal Framework Governing Non-Profit Organizations

The legal framework forms the foundation of the non-profit ecosystem in the UAE, providing a clear reference that regulates establishment processes, governance, operational practices, and compliance. This ensures that organizations operate within an integrated system that supports the sustainability of their impact and aligns with national priorities.

Competent Federal Authority

The Ministry of Community Empowerment is the federal entity responsible for regulating and supporting non-profit organizations across the UAE. It plays a central role in developing and strengthening the sector, with responsibilities that include:

Developing public policies and legislation governing the non-profit organizations sector.	Overseeing licensing and registration procedures.
Approving classifications, sectors, and activities.	Monitoring compliance and issuing periodic reports.
Designing and implementing empowerment programs and institutional capacity-building initiatives.	

The Ministry works in coordination with the relevant local authorities in the Emirates of Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, and Ras Al Khaimah to ensure regulatory alignment and unified standards across the country.

Key Legislation Governing Non-Profit Organizations

The establishment and operation of non-profit organizations in the UAE are governed by a set of federal laws that form the legislative framework for the sector. Key among these is:

First: Federal Decree-Law No. (50) of 2023 Concerning the Regulations of Public Welfare Association

This serves as the primary legislative reference for the establishment and operation of non-profit organizations, covering:

Licensing and registration requirements and procedures.	Mechanisms for the formation of boards and their mandates.
Regulations governing the practice of licensed activities.	Oversight and supervision systems.
Reporting and transparency requirements.	Provisions related to dissolution, merger, or modification of legal structure

Second: Federal Law No. (3) of 2021 Regulating Donations

This law governs the collection of donations with the aim of protecting donors and ensuring the proper use of funds. It includes:

Prohibition of collecting donations without official authorization.	Defined mechanisms and procedures for obtaining donation collection permits.
Controls regulating the advertising of donation campaigns.	Penalties and sanctions for violations.

Note:

Licensing and registering an organization as a non-profit organization does not automatically grant it the right to collect donations. Separate permits must be obtained in accordance with the law, unless the organization's establishment decree explicitly authorizes the collection, receipt, and disbursement of donations.

Third: Federal Law No. (13) of 2018 on the Volunteer Work

This law regulates the framework for volunteer work in the UAE and defines:

The rights and responsibilities of volunteers.	Obligations of entities benefiting from volunteer work.
Controls for registering and managing volunteering opportunities.	Safety and protection requirements for volunteers.

Non-profit organizations that recruit volunteers are required to comply with all provisions of this law, ensuring a safe and well-organized volunteering experience. Compliance as a Pillar of Institutional Sustainability

Compliance as a Pillar of Institutional Sustainability

Compliance with the governing regulations contributes to achieving a number of key objectives including:



Strengthening the trust of the community, partners, and government entities.



Facilitating approval and permit procedures.



Providing legal protection for the organization and its board members.



Increasing the quality of programs and services provided to target groups.



Supporting institutional sustainability over the medium and long term.

The Role of Non-Profit Organizations in Achieving the UAE's Priorities

The UAE views non-profit organizations as essential partners in the community development ecosystem and a key pillar in promoting civic participation and achieving sustainable social impact. This role aligns with the UAE's directions of:

Strengthening social cohesion	Empowering the most vulnerable groups
Building the capacity of the non-profit organizations sector	Expanding partnerships with the government and private sectors
Sustaining and multiplying social impact	

Accordingly, regulatory and legislative frameworks have been designed to enable non-profit organizations to fulfill their role with flexibility and responsibility, reinforcing their presence as effective drivers of development in society.

Forms of Non-Profit Organizations in the UAE

In the UAE, non-profit organizations were not designed as a one-size-fits-all model, but as a flexible ecosystem that reflects the diversity of society and the richness of its initiatives.
For this reason, non-profit organizations take different forms, each representing a unique pathway that serves a specific mission, embraces a clear purpose, and drives social impact suited to its nature.

And this is where the journey begins:

Choosing the right form for the idea... before proceeding to establish it.

1 | Association

An association is a non-profit organization based primarily on a membership system. It is established when seven or more individuals come together around a common social objective, without seeking profit.

Associations are suitable for:

- Community initiatives
- Cultural and professional activities
- Local social work

Key characteristics:

- Derives its strength from its members and their participation
- Managed by an elected board of directors
- Supervised by the general assembly
- Flexible and closely connected to the community.

Funding sources:

- Member subscriptions.
- Revenue from activities and services consistent with the association's objectives.
- Investment returns (as authorized in accordance with the provisions of the law).
- Donations, grants, and bequests in accordance with applicable legislation in the UAE.
- Government grants and subsidies.
- Any other resources and revenue permitted by the bylaws or approved by the competent authority.

An association is the optimal choice when the initiative is based on community interaction, fieldwork, and member participation in decision-making and implementation.

2 | National Foundations

It is a non-profit organization established using funds allocated by the founder to achieve non-profit purposes. It is governed by a board of trustees and does not have an open membership system.

National Foundations are suitable for:

- Organized charitable work.
- Funding and supporting programs and initiatives.
- Long-term impact projects.
- National or specialized initiatives.

Key characteristics:

- Relies on financial sustainability.
- Strong focus on governance.
- Impact is typically national or specialized.
- Professional operational model.

Funding sources:

- Funds allocated at establishment (minimum AED 5 million).
- Revenue from activities and services aligned with the society's objectives.
- Investment returns (as permitted under applicable legislation).
- Donations, grants, and bequests in accordance with UAE laws.

A National Foundations is the optimal choice when the goal is
supporting other initiatives, investing in sustainable solutions, or driving deep and gradual change.

3 | Union

A union is an umbrella entity that brings together five or more non-profit organizations working in the same or related fields, with the aim of coordination, integration, and unifying efforts to enhance impact.

Unions are suitable for:

- Related or similar sectors.
- Collaborative work.
- Building a unified sector voice.
- Improving efficiency and influence.

Key characteristics:

- Does not operate independently but in an integrated framework.
- Represents member entities before relevant authorities.
- Enhances knowledge and experience exchange.
- Improves institutional efficiency.

Funding sources:

- Subscriptions and contributions from member entities.
- Government or institutional support.
- Revenue from activities and services aligned with the union's objectives.
- Investment returns (as permitted under applicable legislation).

A union is the optimal choice when the need is to organize the sector, represent its organizations, and raise the efficiency of joint efforts.

4 | Social Solidarity Fund

A Social Solidarity Fund is a non-profit organization established to serve the employees of a specific entity. It aims to promote social solidarity through financial or social support, or by providing services to members.

Social solidarity funds are suitable for

- Government entities.
- Private sector institutions with large workforces.
- Internal support initiatives.
- Social welfare programs.

Key characteristics:

- Limited scope.
- Clear objectives.
- Subscription-based model.
- Promotion of belonging and solidarity.

Funding sources

- Member subscriptions
- Regular contributions
- Support provided by the affiliated entity, where applicable.

A union is the optimal choice when the need is to organize the sector, represent its organizations, and raise the efficiency of joint efforts.

Scope of work and Activities of Non-profit organizations

Non-profit organizations in the UAE are classified **under 11 main fields**, each covering a number of activities and initiatives. Each organization must select one primary field that reflects the nature of its core work.

Family and Community Empowerment
Focuses on improving quality of life and enhancing the social and economic cohesion of the community.
Examples: family empowerment, youth support, neighborhood initiatives.

Charitable and Humanitarian Work
Providing support and humanitarian aid to meet the needs of the most vulnerable groups.
Examples: food assistance, financial support, relief.

Scientific Research
Focuses on knowledge production and supporting scientific research and development.
Examples: studies, applied research, social innovation.

Culture and Creative Arts
Promotes cultural identity, creativity, arts, and heritage.
Examples: art exhibitions, heritage preservation, supporting creatives.

Health
Promoting public health through prevention, awareness, and improving healthcare services.
Examples: health awareness, patient support, screening campaigns.

Animal Care
Protecting and caring for animals, promoting compassion towards them, and raising community awareness.
Examples: animal shelters, adoption campaigns, awareness.

Professional Development
Supports the development of professions and their members and raises their competence.
Examples: professional associations, specialized training, professional accreditation.

Education
Aims to support education, build skills, and disseminate knowledge.
Examples: scholarships, training programs, student support.

Volunteering
Promotes the institutional volunteerism ecosystem.
Examples: volunteering platforms, capacity building, empowerment programs.

Environment
Protecting the environment and natural resources, promoting sustainability practices and social responsibility.
Examples: tree-planting campaigns, wildlife protection, sustainability.

Recreation and Sports
Promoting recreational and entertainment activities as a healthy lifestyle and supporting sports enthusiasm.
Examples: fan clubs, community activities.

How to Select the Organization's Primary Field

Selecting the primary field for a non-profit organization is a pivotal step in the establishment phase, as it determines the nature of the organization's work, the scope of its activities, and its regulatory framework. It also directly contributes to maximizing the organization’s social impact.

When selecting the field, the following should be considered:

Alignment of the field with the organization's idea, mission, and core objectives.	Compatibility with the UAE's directions and national priorities, enhancing integration with national plans and strategies and contributing to the achievement of their targets.
Actual community need, and the extent to which the chosen field addresses a social challenge or supports a target group.	Founders' capabilities and resources in terms of expertise, assets, and potential partnerships.
Focus on one primary field at the establishment stage, with all activities and initiatives falling within it.	Ability to measure impact and sustainability in the chosen field over the medium and long term.

The Process of Establishing Non-Profit Organizations

In the UAE, there are four legal forms of non-profit organizations, each serving the community in a different way and complementing one another within an integrated national ecosystem that transforms the desire to give into sustainable impact, while connecting community initiatives with national priorities and regulatory legislation.

And this is where the journey begins...

First: The Idea Stage

Description:

This stage aims to shape the organization's initial concept and define its general framework before commencing the formal procedures.

Procedures:

1. Identifying and selecting founders according to technical criteria and conditions.
2. Defining the general objective of establishing the organization.
3. Selecting the form of the organization according to approved legal forms.
4. Defining the field of work in alignment with the UAE's general policies and national development priorities.

Outputs:

- An approved preliminary concept for the idea.
- A clear definition of the nature of the activity.

And this is where the journey begins...

Second: Agreement Phase

Description:

This phase aims to achieve agreement among the founders on the organization's core directions and foundational principles.

Procedures:

1. Hold a founders' meeting.
2. Discuss and approve the organization's general directions and bylaws.
3. Propose three (3) potential names for the organization.
4. Form a temporary committee (if applicable) to oversee the establishment procedures.

Outputs:

- Minutes of the founders' meeting.
- Preliminary approval of the organization's institutional direction.

Third: Application Phase

Description:

This phase involves submitting the establishment application in accordance with legal requirements via the Ministry's website using UAE Pass.

Procedures:

1. Complete the establishment application form.
2. Finalize the articles of association.
3. Attach the required supporting documents and relevant data.

Outputs:

- A complete and formally submitted application for the establishment of a non-profit organization.

Fourth: Approval Phase

Description:

In this phase, the competent authority reviews the application and makes the final decision.

Procedures:

1. The competent authority reviews the application and the supporting documents.
2. The authority may request additional requirements (if necessary).
3. The official decision of establishment and registration is issued.

Outputs:

- The NPO is officially registered.
- The organization is entered in the official registry of the approved entities.

Components of the Bylaws

Choosing the primary field of activity for a non-profit organization is a pivotal step during its establishment phase, as it defines the nature of the organization's work, the scope of its activities, and its regulatory framework, while directly contributing to maximizing its impact on society.

The activities, objectives, and purpose of the non-profit organization, and its target groups	Types of membership, memberships conditions, admission and termination procedures, and members' rights and obligations
Number of board members, their responsibilities, and the required qualifications for members	Rules governing the re-election of board members upon completion of their term
Procedures and principles for governing and regulating annual and non-annual general assemblies	Procedures for amending the bylaws and establishing branches
Regulations and procedures for organizing and participating in activities and events	The organizational structure, including governing bodies, their powers, and operational mechanisms
The resources of the non-profit organization and the framework governing how to be managed and utilized	Conditions, regulations, and procedures for appointing staff
Previsions related to voluntary liquidation and dissolution, and the disposition of funds	

Founder Selection Criteria

- Minimum of **(7) founders** is required
- All founders must be at least **21 years** old.
- Founders must demonstrate good conduct and sound character
- Founders must not have been convicted of any criminal offense involving moral turpitude or dishonesty
- At least 70% of the founders must be Emiratis
- Non-citizens must meet the following conditions: Valid residency permit, At least 3 years of residency, No diplomatic status.

For the union to be valid, it must consist of no fewer than (5) non-profit organizations engaged in similar activities or operating in the same field

Note: Detailed requirements vary depending on the legal form of the non-profit organization.

Steps to establish non-profit organizations

1 The Idea



- Identifying and selecting founders.
- Defining the overall objective.
- Choosing the organizational structure.
- Defining the scope of work.

2 Agreement



- Founders' meeting held.
- Discussion and approval of the organization's general direction.
- Proposal of three (3) names.
- Formation of a temporary committee (if applicable).

3 Submission



- Review of the application and documents by the competent authority.
- Request for fulfillment of any additional requirements (if applicable).
- Issuance of the declaration and registration decision.

4 Approval



- Completion of the establishment application form.
- Completion of the bylaws.
- Attachment of the required supporting documents and data.

Frequently Asked Questions

What are Non-profit Organizations?

They are private legal entities licensed in accordance with the applicable laws of the UAE, established to carry out one or more non-profit activities. They take one of the legal forms stipulated in the Decree-Law and are not primarily established for profit-making purposes.

What is the difference between Non-profit Organizations and individual charitable work?

Individual charitable work is based on personal initiatives, whereas Non-profit Organizations operate within an organized institutional framework subject to governance and oversight. They focus on systematic planning and achieving sustainable and measurable social impact.

What is the role of the temporary committee?

A temporary committee consisting of no fewer than three (3) members represents the Non-profit Organization during its establishment phase. Its role ends upon the election of the first Board of Directors.

Does establishing a Non-profit Organization require allocating funds?

Only national foundations are required, upon establishment, to have the founder allocate no less than AED 5 million to support the operation of the foundation and the achievement of its objectives and purposes.

Does licensing a Non-profit Organization allow it to collect donations?

No. Collecting donations requires obtaining separate permits in accordance with the legislation regulating fundraising in the UAE, except for Non-profit Organizations whose establishment resolutions expressly authorize fundraising activities.

How long do the licensing procedures for a Non-profit Organization take?

The licensing procedures may take up to 30 days from the date all required documents and requirements are completed. The actual processing time may vary depending on the type of organization, the level of application readiness, the clarity of the bylaws, and the accuracy of the submitted information, all of which contribute to expediting the review and approval process.

Can the organization’s objectives or field of work be amended after licensing?

Yes. The objectives or field of work may be amended after licensing in accordance with the approved procedures and subject to obtaining the necessary approvals from the Ministry of Community Empowerment or the relevant local licensing authorities, in line with the applicable legislation.

- **Is it required that all founders be UAE nationals?**

  Nationality requirements vary depending on the type of organization. Certain types require specific percentages of UAE nationals, while allowing the participation of non-nationals in accordance with approved regulations and standards.

- **What is the importance of the organization's bylaws?**

  The bylaws serve as the governing reference document for the organization's operations. They define its objectives, organizational structure, authorities of its governing bodies, decision-making mechanisms, financial resources, and expenditure frameworks. The quality of the drafting directly impacts the speed of approval and the sustainability of the organization.

- **Are Non-profit Organizations subject to supervision and oversight?**

  Yes. Non-profit Organizations are subject to supervision and oversight in accordance with the applicable legislation, ensuring compliance, sound resource management, and the protection of the rights of beneficiaries and stakeholders.

- **Can Non-profit Organizations establish partnerships?**

  Yes. Non-profit Organizations are encouraged to build partnerships with government entities, private sector organizations, and Non-profit Organizations sector to enhance integration, improve implementation efficiency, and maximize community impact, within the approved regulatory frameworks

  .

- **What happens if the organization ceases to carry out its activities?**

  If the organization ceases its activities, it must notify the competent authority and undertake the necessary legal procedures, which may include rectifying its status, suspending activities, or dissolution, in accordance with its bylaws and the applicable legislation.

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