



Membership FAQ

General:

What is the Soroptimist mission?

To improve the lives of women and girls, in local communities and throughout the world.

How do members/clubs support the Soroptimist mission?

Soroptimist members belong to local clubs, which determine the focus of volunteer work in their communities. Club projects can range from renovating domestic violence shelters and providing mammograms to low-income women, to sponsoring self-esteem workshops for teenage girls. In addition, Soroptimists participate in organization-wide programs offered from the federation (more details below).

Membership:

What benefits do members receive?

In addition to intangible rewards such as friendship and personal fulfillment, members also receive the following benefits:

- Opportunity to participate in Soroptimist's life-changing programs
- Subscription to our award-winning Best for Women magazine
- Subscription to our email newsletter, the "Soroptimist Summary"
- Access to numerous documents and tools available on the SIA website
- Leadership development and networking opportunities at club meetings, region conferences, the biennial convention and other meetings
- Opportunity to provide feedback, offer suggestions and voice opinions through the Soroptimist Snapshot online surveys and other market research activities
- Invitations to take advantage of special offers and discounts through our partnering organizations.

Who is eligible for membership?

According to the SI Constitution, to qualify for membership, a candidate should be:

- working in a profession or business or in an occupation of comparable status or responsibilities to those of a person working in a profession or business; or
- recently retired from or temporarily or permanently out of work from a profession or business or an occupation of comparable status or responsibilities to those of a person working in a profession or business; or
- embarking on a career in a profession or business or occupation of comparable status or responsibilities to those of a person working in a profession or business.

Many clubs specifically ask for clarification of the phrase “profession or business” as used in the bylaws. It is understandable why clubs look for guidance in this area, because determining what constitutes a profession or business is not a black and white issue. Even if it were possible to generate an all-inclusive list of titles and occupations that are considered to be part of the profession and business category, the list would be out-of-date almost immediately as women enter new and diverse fields and their professional lives evolve. Additionally, titles continue to become more and more unique to the industries they serve, not always falling into standard categories and rarely articulating the true meaning of a woman’s responsibilities and capabilities.

Therefore, because it is so difficult to provide a concrete definition of “profession or business,” SIA empowers clubs to be inclusive in their interpretation of this phrase (and the related “occupation of comparable status or responsibilities”) rather than exclusive. Instead of focusing solely on title and occupation, clubs are encouraged to look closely at the actual work a potential member does and how her attitude, enthusiasm, ideas, and skill sets would add to the club. In other words, the primary focus of recruitment should be on specific contributions a woman can make to the club and to Soroptimist.

What are the membership types?

Regular Member

- Definition: Those who are actively working in a profession, business, or occupation in an executive or management capacity, or its equivalent.
- Do they have to be assigned a classification code? Yes. The classification code shall be assigned based upon the principal and recognized activity of the firm, company, governmental entity, or institution with which the member is connected.
- What are the 2011-2012 annual federation dues and other mandatory payments? \$52.00 federation dues; \$5.00 SI dues; and \$2.00 liability insurance (United States, Canada, Puerto Rico and Guam only).
- Do dues include a subscription to SIA’s *Best for Women* magazine? Yes.
- What is the required number of regular members needed to maintain a club charter? 15.
- Can a regular member hold office at the club, district, region and/or federation level? Yes, regular members can hold office at all levels.
- Can a regular member qualify as a delegate at district, region and/or federation level? Yes.

Retired/Unemployed Member

- Definition: Those who are retired from active employment or temporarily out of work.
- Do they have to be assigned a classification code? No. However, if a retired/unemployed member re-enters the workforce, she will need to change her member type to regular and be assigned a classification code.
- What are the 2011-2012 annual federation dues and other mandatory payments? \$52.00 federation dues; \$5.00 SI dues; and \$2.00 liability insurance (United States, Canada, Puerto Rico, and Guam only).
- Do dues include a subscription to SIA’s *Best for Women* magazine? Yes.
- Do retired/unemployed members “count” toward the 15 members needed to maintain a club charter? No, 15 **regular** members are required to maintain the charter.
- Can a retired/unemployed member hold office at the club, district, region and/or federation level? Retired/unemployed members can hold office at the club level if the club bylaws allow it. They cannot hold office at any other level.
- Can a retired/unemployed member qualify as a delegate at district, region and/or federation level? Yes.

Embarking Member

- Definition: Those who are in a course of study for, or beginning a career in, a profession, business, or occupation.
- Do they have to be assigned a classification code? Yes, if they are working. If they are still enrolled full time in a professional program of study, they do not need a classification code.
- What are the 2011-2012 annual federation dues and other mandatory payments? \$52.00 federation dues; \$5.00 SI dues; and \$2.00 liability insurance (United States, Canada, Puerto Rico, and Guam only).
- Do dues include a subscription to SIA's *Best for Women* magazine? Yes.
- Do embarking members "count" toward the 15 members needed to maintain a club charter? No, 15 **regular** members are required to maintain the charter.
- Can an embarking member hold office at the club, district, region and/or federation level? Embarking members can hold office at the club level if the club bylaws allow it. They cannot hold office at any other level.
- Can an embarking member qualify as a delegate at district, region and/or federation level? Yes.

Life Member

- Definition: Those members who achieved life member status by July 2001 and who wish to retain that status.
- Do they have to be assigned a classification code? No.
- What are the 2011-2012 annual federation dues and other mandatory payments? \$10 federation dues; \$5.00 SI dues; and \$2.00 liability insurance (United States, Canada, Puerto Rico, and Guam only).
- Do dues include a subscription to SIA's *Best for Women* magazine? No. Life members may subscribe to the magazine by paying \$11 (United States, Canada, Puerto Rico and Guam) or \$15 (all other countries).
- Do life members "count" toward the 15 members needed to maintain a club charter? No, 15 **regular** members are required to maintain the charter.
- Can a life member hold office at the club, district, region and/or federation level? Life members can hold office at the club level if the club bylaws allow it. They cannot hold office at any other level.
- Can life members qualify as a delegate at district, region and/or federation level? Yes.
- How long do life members maintain their status? Life members maintain their status for their lifetime as long as there are no lapses in membership or changes in membership type.
- Can life members change their status? If a life member decides that she wants to be a regular or retired/unemployed member, she may choose to do so but she cannot return to life member status.
- Does the federation still bestow life membership? The federation no longer bestows life membership, but clubs are encouraged to honor members for years of service. The federation continues to sell life member pins and other length of service awards.

How much does membership cost?

Soroptimist members pay dues at three levels—club, region and federation. Club administration, projects and programs are financed through club-level membership dues, which are set by each individual Soroptimist club. Each Soroptimist region also determines its own dues and fees based on region-level activities and projects.

The 2011-2012 SIA federation-level dues are as follows:

- SIA Dues (July 1, 2011-June 30, 2012) = \$52.00*
- SIA New Member Fee = \$7.50

- SIA Liability Insurance Fee = \$2.00 (Required for members living in U.S., Canada, Puerto Rico & Guam)
- SI Dues = \$5.00
- Founders Pennies (optional) = \$5.46
- Total federation-level dues per person: \$71.96 (Outside of the US: \$69.96)

* Members inducted January 1 through June 7, 2012 (or the annual dues billing for the upcoming year) pay pro-rated dues of \$26.00.

What is the difference between a new member and a reinstated member?

New Member:

- Someone who has never been a member of Soroptimist.
- A former member who has not been a member for a year or more is considered a new member.
- A former member who has not been a member during the same club year (July 1-June 30) is considered a new member.

Reinstated Member:

- A member who is re-joining within the same club year (July 1-June 30) is considered a reinstated member.

Clubs:

Why must clubs maintain 15 regular members, and why do the other membership types not “count” toward this requirement?

The 15 member rule has been part of the Soroptimist International Constitution since the 1930s. In 2001, SI created the embarking and retired/unemployed membership categories in response to a poll of the membership in each federation that revealed that members thought there were many potential members who were just starting in careers or who were currently not working who could not, according to the law, be invited to join Soroptimist. Before the addition of these membership categories, members had to be actively engaged in a profession or business to be invited to join. By adding the new types and opening membership to these women, SI hoped to expand the pool of potential members. However, SI strongly supports that Soroptimist is an organization of working women, and that the core of its membership and leadership should continue to be “employed” business and professional women. Therefore, the SI Constitution states that only regular (i.e., working) members will be counted toward the 15 needed to maintain the club charter.

What about meetings—when, where, how long, how formal or informal, etc.?

Club members should decide the best day, time of day, and location of their meetings. They should be held at the convenience of the majority of the members, considering work and life obligations. How often a club meets should be determined by the clubs’ goals and how frequently the members should assemble together in order to accomplish the mission of Soroptimist.

A good rule of thumb is that a meeting should last about one hour, allowing some unscheduled time before and/or after for socializing. The meeting itself should combine club business, education, fellowship, and fun.

A suggested parliamentary procedure and sample business meeting agenda are available on the SIA website for clubs wishing to use such a process. Keep in mind, there is no requirement to use the Soroptimist pledge, prayer, grace, or song.

What are the attendance requirements?

As written in the **SIA Bylaws, Section 5.02 Entitlements: (a)** All members whose participation meets the requirements set by the club bylaws may hold office, speak, make motions, and vote. Clubs shall not require attendance at meetings as a condition of retaining membership in the club.

Do SIA clubs have bylaws?

Clubs are free to adopt bylaws that will aid in effective operation, provided they are not in conflict with the SI Constitution or SIA Bylaws or Federation Procedures. Sample bylaws are available in the membership section of the SIA website.

What is a classification code?

Classification is the four-digit numerical code assigned to a member's occupation. The Classification Guide (available from the SIA website) includes instructions for determining the classification code. Regular members require classification codes, as do embarking members who are working.

What are the requirements when choosing a club name?

As Soroptimist strives to increase awareness of its mission and recruit members, it is increasingly important that both internal and external audiences – recipients of Soroptimist service, potential members, Soroptimist members in other federations, the media and the public at large – can easily identify and locate clubs within our international community. When selecting a new club name or changing an existing club name, the name should not only be geographically descriptive of the community it serves (i.e., contain an actual “place” name such as town, city, county) but should be identifiable throughout the entire Soroptimist family. Additionally, the club name should represent the area of club service rather than the various locations from which membership is drawn. Clubs who are selecting or changing their name are encouraged to contact the membership department at headquarters for guidance and suggestions and submit **Form 204: Application for Change of Name of a Soroptimist Club**.

Can Soroptimist clubs use websites, social media, etc.?

SIA headquarters has developed club website templates that are available to Soroptimist clubs free of charge. This benefit was developed for non-technical users and allows clubs to quickly add or subtract information while maintaining a welcoming and visually attractive website. The content of each website is the club's responsibility and all websites must adhere to SIA's Club and Region Website Guidelines, available in the members area of www.soroptimist.org.

One of Soroptimists' key strengths is its ability to provide an international networking forum for business and professional women. To add to this strength, SIA headquarters has developed several social networking groups for members. These free online programs are a great place to network and share ideas. Members and non-members can join one or all of the Soroptimist groups on Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, or Flickr. Clubs can and are encouraged to establish their club's own social media presence.

What about a club email address?

Club email addresses are an important part of SIA's communication strategy—both internally and externally. To provide access while protecting individual member's privacy, SIA provides all clubs with an email address beginning with their club name and ending with “@soroptimist.net,” along with information on setting up and accessing the account. All clubs should designate someone to access their account on a regular basis (at least once per week).

How does a club become a 501(c)(3) organization? (U.S. clubs only)

Upon chartering, SIA headquarters will provide the club president with the necessary paperwork and information for becoming part of SIA's 501(c)(3) group tax exemption. Clubs are not considered tax exempt until the supporting documentation requested has been filed at headquarters.

Miscellaneous:

What programs are Soroptimist clubs required to participate in?

Currently, there are no program requirements at the federation level. Participation in SIA's signature project, the Soroptimist Women's Opportunity Awards, is strongly urged. This award was established to assist women with primary financial responsibility for their families to obtain the skills training and education necessary to improve their employment status and standard of living for themselves and their family. When clubs participate in SIA programs, they become part of an international effort to improve the lives of women and girls.

Other programs that SIA administers, which clubs can participate in if they choose, are the Soroptimist Workplace Campaign to End Domestic Violence, the Soroptimist Violet Richardson Award, the Soroptimist Club Grants for Women and Girls, the Soroptimist Ruby Award, and Soroptimists STOP Trafficking.

Clubs are also encouraged to participate in the Live Your Dream campaign, which is a fundraising and public awareness activity that encourages all women to live their dreams while helping others to do the same. In addition to selecting one or more programs offered by the federation, local clubs may choose to work on community-based projects that benefit women and girls.

What is the SIA convention?

Held during even-numbered years, federation conventions provide education, networking, and socializing opportunities for clubs and members throughout the federation. In addition to inspiring speakers and workshops, the meeting also offers an opportunity to participate in the federation decision-making process and meet Soroptimists from around the world.

Producing a convention involves certain fixed costs. These costs are divided over the number of clubs equally so that the burden is evenly distributed, resulting in a mandatory convention fee to be paid by clubs every other year. This fee is addressed in Federation Bylaws under **Article X, Fiscal Matters, Section 10.04.**

Each club is entitled to register one delegate (convention meals not included) upon payment of the convention fee. The 2012 convention will be held July 18-21, 2012 at the Hilton Hawaiian Village, Honolulu, Hawaii, U.S.A. The fee will be \$325 and payment is due by March 15, 2012. Clubs chartered from May 1 to the end of convention (in a convention year) are not required to pay the mandatory club registration fee for that convention.

Can men be invited to membership?

The Soroptimist International Constitution, Article I, Section 2 states, "Soroptimist International is an association of Soroptimist federations of classified service clubs for women. Membership is by invitation only."

During the 1980s, Rotary International was forced to admit women to membership. The Supreme Court of the United States ruled that since women were being denied access to business opportunities, and since the Rotary meetings were held in places of public accommodation, Rotary Clubs could not restrict membership to men only. The other men's service organizations quickly changed their requirements and allowed women to join. Women's organizations have not faced the same legal challenges because despite gains toward equality, women have yet to achieve the power and status of men in the business world.

When the Supreme Court decision was announced, Soroptimist clubs in the United States were challenged regarding the restriction of membership to women only. The precedents set in the Rotary decision probably did not apply to women's groups because of their minority status, but SIA did not wish for its clubs to become involved in costly legal battles.

It was in this environment that SIA asked for, and finally received in 1990, a waiver to the SI Constitution to allow clubs to invite men to membership. This waiver, however, was granted only to those clubs in U.S. states with public accommodation laws. SI granted a second waiver in 1997 to clubs in Brazil, which has similar public accommodation laws. Such laws might support legal action against a Soroptimist club by a man seeking to join, if he was denied membership based solely on gender. This would be hard to prove because Soroptimist membership is by invitation only, but lawsuits are expensive. At the time, 36 states in the United States had public accommodation laws. There have never been more than 35 men in Soroptimist membership.

U.S. clubs in the states with these public accommodation laws may invite men to membership, as may clubs in Brazil, if they choose. This option is not available to clubs outside Brazil or the United States. The recruitment and retention material that is used throughout the federation reflects the aims and purposes of Soroptimist as an organization for business and professional women who wish to improve the lives of women and girls.

What is Live Your Dream?

The Live Your Dream campaign inspires people from all walks of life to live their dreams, while helping less fortunate women and girls to live theirs. It will do so by offering ways for people to get involved with Soroptimist's mission whether they are a member in a club or not. The Campaign is a self-motivated community of people who wish to support women and girls in their quest to lead better lives. This is accomplished through hands-on opportunities, awareness and advocacy efforts, and financial support—or any combination of these strategies. Campaign participants determine their level of engagement.

What are Soroptimist Associates?

Formerly, Associates were a type of membership available to eligible prospective members who wished to join Soroptimist and there was no club in her community, or to any current member of a disbanding club. During the Soroptimist 41st Biennial Convention in July 2010, members voted in favor of revising the SIA Bylaws which removed Associates as a membership type. At their March 2011 meeting, the SIA Board of Directors decided to offer new entry points and connections to Soroptimist through the Associates status. As the concept of ways to engage Associates evolved, it morphed into the revitalized Live Your Dream strategy and it was decided to incorporate that group into the LYD community and to no longer use the term "Associates."