

# Dojo Groups

## *Guidance Overview*

The CoderDojo Foundation would like to encourage the community to work more closely together. Our hope is that this will encourage Dojos to share resources and work together to help CoderDojo reach more people, do more interesting and creative things, and reduce the administrative overhead on Champions.

## What is a Dojo Group

A Dojo Group is any group of 2 or more Dojos who come together, usually within a geographic region, who want to share resources to make their Dojos better for the young people who attend them or increase the reach of their Dojos by promoting them at local events.

It can also be an effective way to reduce the administrative overhead of the groups in a particular area, especially when there are tasks that need to be duplicated, such as looking for mentors or performing background checks on mentors.

There are already several Dojo Groups around the world. These were mostly informal groups set up by people who wanted to actively encourage Dojos in their region or to share an administrative task. Some of these will be covered in more detail in the case studies in this document, but they include:

- CoderDojo Romania
- CoderDojo Belgium
- CoderDojo Italia
- CoderDojo Poland
- CoderDojo Scotland
- CoderDojo Western Australia

# Identify reasons

One of the key things to do before starting a Dojo Group is to identify the reasons that one is needed and what the group plans to achieve. These don't need to be strict aims & objectives, but can be used to guide the group.

Reasons for starting a group may vary depending on the region you're in. It would be a good idea to arrange to get a coffee or have a Skype call with some other champions to talk about possible reasons. Here are some ideas get you started:

- ☐ Share advice on running a Dojo as a group of champions & mentors
- ☐ Share resources & hardware (e.g. laptops, Raspberry Pis, Galileo, Arduinos)
- ☐ Share administrative overhead (e.g. background checks, training sessions, compliance with legislation)
- ☐ Look for funding from local sources as a group
- ☐ Promote your Dojos at regional & local events
- ☐ Finding more mentors & targeting local organisations for mentors

# Talk to other Dojos

Whilst you are working on the reasons for setting up a group you should start talking to other Dojos which might want to form part of your group.

In most cases this will mean reaching out to Champions who you've already been talking to before, but it could also include introducing yourself to Champions who you've not met yet. It may be worth checking to see if anyone you know can introduce you to a Champion or a mentor in a Dojo first, but if not you can find public contact details for most Dojos on [Zen](#). You can also get in touch with the Foundation to see if they know any champions in your region.

# Introducing yourself via email

If you are contacting someone using details you've found on Zen its important to remember a few tips to make sure your email comes off well:

- Have a look around and check if the Dojo is active first. If it is not active just try emailing once and if you don't get a reply, don't keep emailing.

- Don't email every address you can find for a Dojo, pick one and only try another if you get no reply or an error after a reasonable amount of time (a week or so).
- Don't forget to introduce **yourself** and **your dojo** first.
- Only email if you think they would be interested. If you're setting up a Dojo Group in Utah emailing a Dojo in Glasgow is probably not reasonable.
- Be polite and respectful. People in other Dojos may not want to get involved in the group, don't pressure anyone.
- Be clear about why you're contacting them. Don't send an email just saying "lets talk" without explaining why.

Once a few Dojos are involved you should arrange to meet up over coffee or have a call with the people involved. This is an opportunity to discuss the reasons for setting up the group and decide how you would like to move forward with the group.

## Set up a Dojo Group

Once you've figured out the reason for setting up, and have a few Dojos involved, it's time to actually set up a group. At this stage you already have an informal group, and you might decide to stay like that.

However, if you're going to be doing things like dealing with background checks or looking for sponsorship then you'll need to consider one of the more formal types of Dojo Group.

## Types of Dojo Group

There are many types of group that your Dojo Group should take. Here are some overarching types which can be used as a guide. You will need to take a look at the options available to you in your area before making a decision.

### **Informal**

An informal group is the easiest type of group to form. It only requires mutual agreement and participation from Dojos that want to be involved. It's great for sharing resources and getting mentors to meet up for common activities.

It can be a nice starting point to work up to other forms of Dojo Group.

### **Pros**

- Requires almost no set up

- Easy to get people to buy in
- Easy for people to get out of

**Cons**

- Its difficult to seek sponsorship
- Its unlikely you will be able to get a bank account
- People can walk away without much, if any, warning

**Voluntary Association with Constitution**

An association with a constitution is more formal group. It carries some benefits over an informal group such as being able to open a bank account. This is good if you're seeking sponsorship or performing a task which requires a more formal body to apply, such as getting background checks on mentors.

The rules regarding associations vary from country to country, but you can normally find good resources online about setting up a voluntary association, try googling "[country] voluntary association" or "[country] unincorporated association". For example the [SCVO in Scotland's site](#) or [The Wheel in Ireland](#). Most countries require that a voluntary association have people who take specific positions, for example a chair and a treasurer.

**Pros**

- It is usually possible to get a bank account
- The more formal structure will normally allow you to enter agreements as the body (such as getting insurance)

**Cons**

- Generally members can find themselves liable for debts or actions of the association
- You must agree to a constitution and elect people to positions (chair, treasurer) which is an initial overhead
- Depending on the jurisdiction there may be additional regulatory requirements placed on this type of Dojo Group

**Company, Non-Profit, or Charity**

The most complicated type of group to set up is a company or charity. It comes with regulatory requirements but may provide significant benefits over other types to larger Dojo Groups which need to receive large sums of money, or in some cases groups who wish to take out insurance.

The other benefits are that they limit members' liability, but at the expense of being complicated setup and having complex regulatory requirements.

As with volunteer associations the rules regarding companies and particularly charities and non-profit companies can vary significantly from country to country, but there is a host of information on the

web about setting them up.

**Pros**

- Give the group credibility
- Limit the liability of members
- Enable the group to fundraise more effectively
- Allow the group to enter agreements with third parties

**Cons**

- Depending on jurisdiction can be difficult to navigate the legal requirements
- Increased responsibility on Directors in relation to financial reporting and transparency
- Ongoing reporting requirements