



Starting a State Geothermal Association

Every state that has geothermal heating and cooling as a viable option for homes and businesses needs to consider initiating a statewide geothermal association. A locally run organization will understand the needs and dynamics of the state and will be better able to address the opportunities and challenges facing consumers, contractors, and utilities.

Part I - The Idea

Generally, when starting a state-level market development organization, having several people involved with the same interest and motivation is desirable, since it spreads the initial workload. But how do you find people ready to take on a project of this kind?

- Chat with peers at conferences and industry events to introduce the idea and get a feel for those who agree regarding the need for a state association.
- Reach out to local electric cooperatives, IOU's, municipal utilities, or GHP equipment dealers/distributors/manufacturers to see if they are interested in supporting the effort.
- Reach out to national organizations like GeoExchange or IGSHPA. Their work brings them in contact with people from all over the country and it is very likely they know a few individuals in your state that you can reach out to.
- Once you've identified some like-minded folks who support the idea of a state-level GHP market development organization, you're ready to move forward.

Part II - First Steps

Decide on which people to include in the initial planning meeting.

- It is recommended that you limit the number of people for the initial planning sessions.
 - Too many people at the beginning stage of the process will likely slow things down. It is generally easier to plan meeting times and get the foundation laid when there are a few key individuals involved.
- Don't be overly concerned about what parts of the industry the initial participants come from or where they are geographically located within the state. Having a core group of motivated individuals involved at the outset will get you off and running.

Initial Planning Meeting Location:

- Zoom or Teams meetings work best. People won't have to travel, and it can be much easier to get things scheduled. Virtual meetings are the next best thing to in-person meetings and reduce the amount of over-talk you often get with phone calls. You also can share screens and show documents, which can greatly improve the efficiency of the meeting. However, if you don't have the ability to initiate and run a virtual meeting, a conference call will suffice.
 - Identify one individual to be the session leader and task them with the following:
 - Create a Zoom or Teams meeting and send out invitations or be the origin of the conference call.
 - Create an agenda so the meeting stays focused.
 - Lead the group through the agenda during the meeting.
 - Record notes of the meeting discussions that are then distributed to the group later.

Initial Planning Meeting Agenda: The agenda should include the following topics.

- Introductions, if necessary. It is likely you will be starting out with a mix of people who are not familiar with each other.
- Goals of the organization.
- Bylaws. Find an existing set of bylaws to use as a reference for your organization. Another state association may be willing to share their bylaws for use as a starting point.
 - A draft set of bylaws will provide guidance on board composition and the specific committees that are needed at the outset.
 - The draft bylaws can serve as a foundation/pattern for your organization's bylaws, with necessary adjustments to fit your specific needs. Be sure that you have permission from the organization that provided the original document. It is far easier to adjust an existing document than to create your own from scratch.
- Task list for the next meeting.
- Decision on date and time of the next meeting.
 - Schedule this for no more than a week or two out, if possible. This will encourage people to focus on their tasks and it will keep the process moving forward.

Initial Planning Meeting: (1 hour)

- The meeting leader will have already sent out the agenda but can also share it online if the first meeting is virtual.
- Introductions should come first. It's a good idea to start getting familiar with names, faces and role in the industry.
- Begin with a discussion of the organization's goals.
 - This is the foundation you will work from when developing the bylaws, committees and other aspects of the organization.

- As a group, decide whether the new organization is going to function primarily as an information resource for GHP market development or does it intend to be active and hands-on with sponsored training, marketing, etc. While both are valuable and necessary, launching a fully functioning market development organization involves a heightened level of dedication and effort from the leaders and membership of the organization.
- Decide the basic board and committee arrangement (number of board seats, number of committees, etc.)
- Decide on a prioritized list of actions for the next meeting.
 - Nominations for board positions should be the priority. At the outset, there are formative decisions that must be made by the board and establishing the composition of the board will add structure to the organization.
 - Provide prospective board members with a framework of the organization's goals and structure and request that they bring up any questions, comments or concerns at the next meeting.
- Don't try to do too much at the first meeting. Be respectful of people's time. Try to keep the meeting to no more than an hour.

Part III – Continue Moving Forward

Between Meetings:

- Facilitate interactions among the planning group members between meetings. Group email works great for sharing ideas that developed after the initial meeting. You can also set up a Dropbox or some other kind of work sharing platform at the outset. The session leader should go ahead and establish email groups to make it easier to send out emails to the appropriate people. The first email group will be all the people involved in the initial planning process. Once the organization begins to take shape, there will be separate email groups for the board and each of the committees.

Ex: MOGEO Planning, MOGEO Board, MOGEO Training Committee

Meeting Minutes:

- The meeting leader will develop the minutes from each meeting and distribute them to the planning group. The minutes can be sent out accompanied by the agenda for the next meeting or the agenda can be sent out a few days in advance of the next meeting date.

Planning Meetings:

- At the outset, meetings should be held approximately every two weeks to keep the effort moving forward, while also allowing enough time to complete tasks. Remember, most, if not all the participants have a full-time job or are running their own business. Time is precious.
- Begin to finalize organization goals (dependent on final acceptance by the future board), such as number of board members, types of committees, number of committee members, etc. This will directly support efforts to engage and recruit board members and committee members and allow development of an informational hand-out to potential nominees. Develop a one-pager that summarizes organization goals, board structure (responsibilities and expectations) and committee structure (responsibilities and expectations).
- Once the board is finalized, you can transition from aspirational planning meetings to actual board meetings.

Part IV - Board Creation & Details

- GHP Association Boards function best when they are comprised of members that represent different sectors of the geothermal industry (contractors, drillers, architects, engineers, manufacturers, distributors, vendors, utilities, schools, etc.) This approach provides multiple perspectives on market development within the state and what issues/opportunities the organization should focus on.
- Try to recruit participants from different areas of the state. Geological variations, as well as utility incentive structures within the state can also impact the market for GHP systems.
- Keep in mind that the first iteration of the board may not be able to address all the market variations and priorities described above. As the board takes shape and the organization gains momentum, committee structure/participation and future board changes will allow the organization to adjust and adapt.
- By necessity, the total number of board seats should be an odd number. This can serve to lessen the opportunity for a 'tie vote' during Board deliberations.

An example of Board structure based on the types of representation envisioned for the state.

Total: (13) members

Breakdown: (4) contractors, drillers, vendors; (3) utilities – cooperatives, IOU's, public utilities; (3) manufacturers; (3) other – engineers, architects, schools, associations, etc.

Part V - Committee Structure & Details

- Committees should be structured and empowered to be the ‘movers and shakers’ of the organization. When possible, strive for a broad mix of industry representation. One of the most important personal attributes identified for committee members is self-motivation. The overall purpose of the organization is to develop a thriving and self-sustaining market for geothermal heat pumps by delivering marketing resources, training and utility outreach programs that will move the industry forward. And you need highly motivated people to accomplish this.
- Develop as many committees as necessary to accomplish the goals of the organization. Some examples would be:
 - *Marketing Committee* – tasked with creating and maintaining the organization’s website, social media, and development of marketing/education materials that can be used by the organization’s members.
 - *Legislative Outreach* – tasked with developing relationships with state legislators to educate them on the value of geothermal to the state. The goal is to encourage state incentives or to get burdensome regulations addressed.
 - *Workforce Development* – tasked with outreach to technical schools, unions, or other educational entities to encourage people entering the workforce to consider a career designing and installing geothermal HVAC systems.
 - *Training* – tasked with creating and implementing training for contractors, builders, architects, engineers or others that would gain from learning more about the benefits of geothermal heating and cooling, or for those that may be new to the industry or need continuing education credits.

The Acting Chair or the Board Chair may want to set up individual committee email groups to facilitate sending messages intended for specific groups.

Each committee should have a ‘Lead’ individual or Committee Chair that will be responsible for developing the agenda and scheduling the meetings (via online or conference call). The committee meetings should run in a similar fashion to the board meetings. The Committee Chair will also be the liaison between the committee and the board and can function as the contact person for that committee.

Part VI – State & Federal Registration & Details

- The individual who registers the organization as a non-profit with the state and federal government will be required to provide some personal information. Make sure this person understands his or her obligations and liability.
- Address: An address for the organization will be needed to file non-profit registration paperwork and for all legal and tax-related documents. Take care to choose an address that will have considerable longevity – 5+ years.

- Consider using an address that has staff on hand to keep track of incoming mail and documents that may need to be acted on in a timely manner. One of the organization's founding sponsors may be able to provide this support.
- A sponsoring utility such as an electric cooperative can be a good choice if the utility is agreeable. They are permanent and generally will have staff support available to assist the organization.
- Summary of Tasks:
 - Register the organization with the state. Provide the Articles of Incorporation for a Nonprofit Corporation (states may differ on the necessary steps and paperwork).
 - Complete the Federal registration as a non-profit organization (Form 1024).
 - File for a federal IRS Employer Identification Number.

Part VII - Banking Considerations

- Decide on a bank that will meet the needs of the organization:
 - Pick a bank that has multiple branches throughout the state. While it is likely that most of the banking will be done online, accessibility is important for deposits or other in-person services the Treasurer may require.
 - For contingency purposes, be sure to have another Board member named on the account.
 - Both Board members will need to be present at the time of account initiation to sign the necessary paperwork.
 - Be prepared to make an opening deposit in the new account before it can be made active.
 - The organization should have checks and a debit card for the account.

Part VIII – Board & Committee Communication

- While email groups work fine for sending out announcements and invitations to meetings, consider setting up some kind of shared platform for live document sharing or a document library. Microsoft 365, Dropbox, OneDrive, and SharePoint are all examples of document sharing platforms.
- You will want to share certain documents in the early stages of organization start-up.
- Draft Bylaws – The Draft Bylaws document will need to be reviewed and refined by the board. This may be best accomplished by placing the document on a shared platform where can be accessed by the planning group.
 - Consider approaching an existing state geothermal association for a copy of their bylaws and asking permission to use them as a template. Go through the document line by line and make any necessary changes/additions.
 - Changes to the document should be highlighted and initialed by the individual authoring the adjustments. These changes will then be reviewed at the next board meeting and be accepted or revised.

- Other documents will need to be shared with the planning group or the board. Consider developing an informative one-pager to share with prospective board members, committee members or other interested parties.

Part IX – Membership Fees & Details

- The general recommendation is to set membership fees at a level consistent with what other geothermal associations in neighboring states have established, with necessary adjustments based on regional costs. East and West coast states are likely to have elevated costs for space rental, business services, etc., when compared to Midwestern states.
- Lower membership fees will likely attract more members because there's not much of a financial hurdle for what they will receive as membership benefits. The trade-off is that the level of available financial resources is likely to dictate what's possible for the organization in terms of market development, promotion & advertising, etc.
- Higher membership fees, in comparison, may attract dedicated and motivated people who can contribute ideas, time and resources to the organization. Higher fees can also be advantageous in that a larger financial base is available to support training, education, marketing and lobbying.

Membership Categories:

- There are a variety of ways in which to categorize membership levels. Look at what other geothermal associations have done and choose the levels/features/benefits that make the most sense for your formative organization. See below.

Ex: NY-GEO

Associate Membership	\$ 50/yr
Non-Profit Organization Membership	\$ 100/yr
Business (0-5 employees)	\$ 250/yr
Business (6-25 employees)	\$ 500/yr
Business (26-49 employees)	\$ 1000/yr
Business (50-99 employees)	\$ 2000/yr
Utility Membership	\$ 2500/yr
Business (100-249 employees)	\$ 3000/yr
Business (250+ employees)	\$ 5000/yr

Ex: MOGEO

Associate or Product Representative	\$100/yr
Small Installers, Designers, Utilities, Drillers (<6 employees, <10k meters)	\$150/yr
Large Installers, Designers, Utilities, Drillers (6+ employees, 10k+ meters)	\$300/yr
Distributors	\$500/yr
Manufacturers	\$1500/yr

New Member Information Brochure:

- Create an informative brochure to be given to prospective new members.
- The brochure should provide basic information about the organization and what it strives to accomplish for geothermal market development within the state. Include details on membership levels/fees and the benefits of being a member.

Part X – Time for Action!

- At this point, the new geothermal association will be registered and incorporated. It will have a bank account, governing board, topic committees and membership fee structure.
- It is time to initiate topic committees.
 - The Board Chair should inform each committee group that the organization is ready to commence. The Chair should initiate the first committee meeting, after which the committee will be essentially autonomous, but reporting to the Board monthly.
 - Each committee should begin by developing a priority list of issues/opportunities in the state pertaining to their specific area of focus, followed by an action plan to engage on those specific issues/opportunities.
 - The Committee Chair will consult with the Board contact as needed, reporting to the Board monthly regarding priorities and action plans, both of which should be reviewed and approved by the board.

Marketing Committee (First Priority)

- The Marketing Committee will be one of the most important groups to get organized and moving forward. The development of a functional website and introductory marketing materials will enable all other committees to be more effective.
 - Website - Web presence is more important today than ever before. Immediately engage with a web developer that can build a site that is both educational and functional (webinars, training, taking payments, etc.).

Start Basic – Request a quote for a basic site...5 pages to start. Site design is a collaborative process and takes some time. Starting with the basics (Home Page, Contact Page and three information pages) will get the organization's name and purpose into the public realm. Retaining a developer is the first step to establishing the organization's web presence.

Domain Name – Choosing the domain name is an important decision as it will become a major component of the organization's branding. The domain name must be easy to remember and should convey a fundamental indication of the driving purpose of the organization. For example, the Missouri Geothermal Association chose MissouriGeo.com. It's clear that this is a state association, and it communicates in a very basic and shorthanded way what they're concerned with...geo (geothermal). There is some urgency in securing a domain name or names. Start the process with a preferred choice (.com) but be prepared to settle for .org or .net (or get all three).

Recruiting Time

- Communicate to Board and Committee appointees that they are fundamentally indispensable to achieving the goals and objectives of the organization. This includes funding support in the form of membership fees.

Note: It is preferable to utilize accounting software for generating invoices, or simply develop an invoice template that can be modified for that purpose.

- Develop a New Member Information Form that gathers specific information for the association's records. Be sure to include:
 - Company Name
 - Company Contact Name
 - Company Address
 - Phone Number
 - Email Address
 - Types of Services Performed
 - Any State Required License Numbers

Part XI – First Annual Meeting

First Annual Meeting:

- Start the planning process for the association's first Annual Meeting. Plan for approximately 50-100 people to attend, though this can vary widely depending on the size of the board and the amount of effort/resources dedicated to member recruitment, agenda development and meeting promotion.
- Regarding agenda development, consider what resources are readily available. It is very likely that board and committee members have considerable technical and market development knowledge or skills that can be channeled into the structure of the meeting. Also, don't hesitate to reach out to IGSHPA or other geothermal associations for training resources, agenda development and meeting promotion support. Note: Future annual meetings should be held at the same time each year, or at least the same month each year.
- If it not practical to hold an annual meeting due to time or financial constraints, consider an alternative path.
 - 'Alternative to First Annual Meeting' – If, for whatever reason, it is not practical to plan an Annual Meeting with a high likelihood of success, consider holding smaller 'meet & greet' meetings combined with a training deliverable in various locations around the state. This can prove beneficial for a variety of reasons.
 - Provide future members with needed training in geothermal installation or design that qualify for Continuing Education credits.
 - Provide visibility for the organization's efforts while recruiting other businesses and individuals to become members.
 - For geographical coverage, consider holding 4-5 'meet & greet' meetings at various locations across the state.

Part XIII – Keep the Momentum Going

A successful, fully functional geothermal association is more affective when the members work together to build forward momentum. It requires considerable time and effort to organize and motivate a large, diverse group of people that already have full-time jobs. While it's important to set realistic goals for the organization's board and committees, it's also important to reach for aspirational goals as well. Don't hesitate to communicate with other regional and national geothermal groups to collaborate and share. Market development is a moving target, and the industry will certainly work better, the more we work together.