Governance Charter Template

Thriving's Governance chapter lays out nine sections every real, durable charter covers, from Twin Oaks' membership agreement to a housing cooperative's bylaws, scaled to the size of what's being governed. This is the fill-in version of that structure. A three-household mutual aid agreement can cover all nine sections in two pages; a founding community's full charter will run longer, but the structure doesn't change with scale, only the depth of each section does. Skipping a section doesn't make that question go away, it just means the group discovers the gap during an actual dispute instead of on paper, calmly, in advance.

Name of this group / agreement

1. Purpose and scope

What is this agreement actually for, and what does it not cover? A charter that tries to be everything to everyone ends up meaning nothing in particular.

1. _____

2. _____

2. Membership

Who's in, how someone joins, and how someone leaves.

QUESTION	ANSWER
Who is currently a member?	
How does a new member join?	
How does a member leave in good standing?	

3. Decision-making authority

Who actually decides what, and by what process. Name the actual mechanism, consensus, sociocracy, a simple vote, one person with defined authority for defined decisions, not "we'll discuss it as a group." See Thriving's Governance chapter for a comparison of consensus and sociocracy if you haven't picked one yet.

DECISION TYPE	WHO DECIDES	BY WHAT PROCESS
Day-to-day / routine		
Significant (spending above a set amount, new members)		
Fundamental (changing this charter, dissolving the group)		

4. Contributions and obligations

What each member or household is actually expected to do or provide, and on what schedule. Vague expectations are the single most common source of resentment in any shared arrangement.

MEMBER / HOUSEHOLD	WHAT'S CONTRIBUTED (LABOR, CASH, GOODS, DUTY)	SCHEDULE

5. Monitoring and enforcement

Who notices when an obligation isn't met, and what happens next. Name the actual first step.

QUESTION	ANSWER
Who notices a missed obligation?	
First step when one is missed	
What happens if it continues?	

6. Dispute resolution

Where does an ordinary disagreement actually go before it escalates. Name the process and who facilitates.

QUESTION	ANSWER
Who can be asked to mediate?	
How is mediation requested?	
What happens if mediation doesn't resolve it?	

7. A separate process for real danger

Violence, theft, and abuse need a different, faster track than an ordinary dispute. Thriving's Justice & Conflict chapter describes a fast-track removal protocol for exactly this. Name your group's version explicitly, even briefly, rather than assuming the dispute-resolution process above will stretch to cover it.

1. _____

2. _____

8. Amendment process

How the charter itself gets changed, and by whom. Too rigid and it's ignored the first time it doesn't fit; too easy to amend and it never holds anyone to anything.

_____

9. Dissolution and exit

What happens to shared property, funds, and obligations if the group ends, or if one member leaves. The section founding groups are most tempted to skip, and the one that causes the most damage later if it was never answered.

1. _____

2. _____

Legal structure, if any

See Thriving's Governance chapter for what a co-op, a land trust, and an HOA each actually provide legally, and Ostrom's eight design principles for what makes a shared-resource agreement hold up over time regardless of which legal form it takes.

QUESTION	ANSWER
Legal form (informal agreement, co-op, land trust, HOA, other)	
Filed with which state or agency, if any	
Attorney or filing service used, if any	

Signatures

NAME	SIGNATURE	DATE

pbj.media/governance-charter-template · Revisit this charter on a fixed schedule, not only when something has already gone wrong, and keep a copy wherever the group's other founding documents live.