

**WASHINGTON AREA
SECULAR HUMANISTS**

**MEMBERSHIP
HANDBOOK**



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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to WASH! We're glad that you've decided to become a member of one of the largest regional secular humanist organizations in the United States. You'll find that we are a rather diverse group with respect to age, political orientation, and personal interests. However, we share a common commitment to learning more about our world, and addressing its problems through reason and inquiry.

WASH is an all-volunteer organization. This handbook will give you a basic idea of how we are organized, and how you can participate in our activities and governance. We urge you to get involved – the rewards are great even if the pay isn't!

If you have comments or ideas about any aspect of WASH, please get in touch with your local chapter coordinator or any board member. You'll find contact information in the "Contacts" section of this handbook, which is provided as a separate insert. Once again, on behalf of all the members, welcome aboard!

WHAT IS WASH?

WASH is a regional organization of people who share and promote the secular humanist philosophy. Its primary purpose is to provide a sense of community for humanists in the mid-Atlantic area. We do this by hosting a variety of intellectual and social events, and providing opportunities for our members to interact with a diverse group of individuals who are united by our shared commitment to humanistic principles.

Our worldview is based on reason, empathy and a commitment to making life meaningful through better understanding of ourselves and our universe. We respect the views of others, and seek to better understand them. However, we do not believe that revealed truths, mythical forces and beings, and promises of after-life rewards provide a sensible basis for ethics or morality.

WASH is an independent, self-governing organization, managed by an elected board of directors. We are an affiliate of the American Humanist Association, a Cooperating Local Group of the Council for Secular Humanism, and a member of the Atheist Alliance International. We also maintain close contact with other like-minded organizations. WASH is incorporated in the state of Maryland as a nonprofit, 501(c)(3) educational organization.

MEMBERSHIP

Anyone can become a member of WASH by paying the dues established by the board of directors.

While we hope that most members share the principles and goals of our organization, there is no “test” or “statement of commitment” required for membership. We encourage discussion and debate about our goals and activities.

All WASH members are entitled to vote in elections for the board of directors, and receive the monthly newsletter, *WASHline*. Members are also welcome (and encouraged!) to participate in all local chapter activities and WASH-wide events. You’ll find more information about these things in the following sections.

All WASH members are encouraged to “spread the word” about our organization, and mention us when writing letters to the editor, etc. Please remember, however, that only the board of directors can make official statements on behalf of WASH.

LOCAL CHAPTERS

There are six local chapters – Maryland/DC, Northern Virginia, Baltimore, Frederick, Central Virginia and Richmond. Each chapter holds monthly meetings. Meeting formats vary from informal discussions on topics of interest to formal presentations by invited speakers, many of them

distinguished in their fields. Topics include science, religion, history, current events, and philosophy, and whatever else the members might be interested in. Some chapters also sponsor outings, social events and other activities.

While most WASH members participate in the chapter nearest to their residence, this is not a requirement. All WASH members are welcome to attend meetings of *any* of the chapters, and to get involved in their activities. All WASH meetings and activities are open to the public, and visitors are always welcome – bring your friends!

Each chapter has a coordinator, who is the chapter's liaison with the board of directors and is also responsible for general direction of the chapter's activities. The chapters choose their own coordinators and establish their own internal organization. Some chapters have their own committees for programs, publicity, etc.

Each chapter receives a set amount of annual funding from WASH, which can be used for any purpose consistent with the organization's goals – publicity, fees and expenses for guest speakers, refreshments at meetings, etc. If additional funding is needed for a chapter project, the chapter can request support from the board of directors, and also carry out its own fundraising efforts.

You can find information about chapter activities in *WASHline*, and also on the chapter web sites. The individual chapter coordinators will be glad to provide details – see *WASHline* for contact information.

SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS

WASH members who are interested in studying and discussing a particular topic or issue may organize a Special Interest Group (SIG). SIGs typically operate very informally, and plan their own activities as desired by the members. SIGs may advertise their meetings in *WASHline*.

THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

WASH is governed by a board of directors consisting of between 10 and 12 members who serve for staggered two-year terms. The board directs the operations of the organization, establishes and executes the budget, oversees publication of *WASHline* and maintenance of the WASH web site, represents WASH in dealings with other organizations and the media, and carries out other WASH-wide projects.

Elections for the board are held at the annual election meeting, usually in June. An announcement of the meeting is published in *WASHline* at least 90 days before the meeting date. Any WASH member can run for the board. Board

candidates can be nominated by the board itself, by each chapter, or by a petition signed by at least three other WASH members. Nominating petitions must be received at least 60 days prior to the meeting, and names of nominees are published in *WASHline* at least 30 days prior to the meeting. Members who are unable to attend the annual meeting can vote by mail-in ballot. Detailed election procedures are in Article IV of the WASH Bylaws, and will also be published each year in *WASHline* along with the annual election meeting notice.

Board meetings are held approximately every two months, or more frequently if required. In addition to attending meetings, board members are expected to serve on committees, work on WASH projects and carry out administrative functions. Chapter coordinators who are not on the board may attend board meetings as non-voting members.

The corporate officers (President, Vice-President, Treasurer and Secretary) are elected by the board at the first board meeting after the annual election meeting, and serve until the next annual election meeting.

You'll find a current list of board members and officers in each issue of *WASHline*, and also on the Contact page of this handbook. There's a special email address (board@wash.org) for sending a message to all the board members. If you have a question, idea or concern about any aspect of

WASH, please let the board know. If you'd like a copy of our Bylaws, contact the secretary (email: info@wash.org), and be sure to include "Request for WASH Bylaws" in the subject header.

WASHline

WASHline is our monthly newsletter. Its basic purpose is to inform the members about the activities of each chapter, and also of any WASH-wide information of interest. *WASHline* also includes short articles, illustrations, book reviews, letters-to-the-editor, community news and other features of interest.

Members are strongly encouraged to contribute to *WASHline*. Because of space limitations, submissions should not exceed 750 words. For detailed information about contributing to *WASHline*, check the "Editor's Notes" section that appears on in every issue, or contact the editor at the email address on the contact page of this handbook.

ELECTRONIC RESOURCES

WASH maintains a web site containing membership and contact information, a calendar of events, news and articles of interest, and links to related organizations' sites. Each of the chapters maintains a web site (linked from the WASH site) with information about local programs and events.

WASH also sponsors several on-line email discussion lists (LISTSERVs) to facilitate interaction among WASH members. Once subscribed to a WASH list, users can send and receive messages on a topic appropriate to the specific list (e.g. local chapter events, general discussion, or special interest). Individual subscribers may opt to send and receive messages via email or through a web interface. Specific rules and etiquette guidelines, as well as instructions for managing your subscription, are provided by the list manager upon subscription. A list of WASH-sponsored email lists, along with subscription instructions, may be found on the WASH web site.

From time to time the WASH Board of Directors will broadcast an email message to those members who have chosen to receive such messages. To receive WASH Announcements, please either include a current email address on your membership renewal form, or send email to announce@wash.org asking to be added to the subscription list. Requests for removal from the list may similarly be made by email.

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