



Comprehensive Manual: Starting & Operating a Free Clinic

Presented by:



WWW.FAFCC.ORG



Introduction

This comprehensive manual provides a detailed guide to starting, managing, and staffing a free clinic.

It covers legal structures, sample bylaws, liability protection options (Sovereign Immunity and FTCA), job descriptions, strategies for recruiting volunteer healthcare providers, methods for attracting student volunteers, and national resources for securing free prescription services and other necessary supplies.

Steps to Starting a Free Clinic

Step 1: Conduct a Community Needs Assessment

- Assess the healthcare needs in your community to determine the most critical services your clinic will offer (primary care, dental services, mental health support, etc.). Engage local stakeholders like hospitals and nonprofits to collect data and identify gaps in healthcare.

Step 2: Define Your Mission and Vision

- Clarify the clinic's purpose and long-term goals. Your mission should focus on delivering free healthcare to underserved populations, while the vision can emphasize growth, improved access, or enhanced health outcomes.

Step 3: Incorporate as a Nonprofit

- File Articles of Incorporation with your state's Department of State and apply for 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status with the IRS. This will allow your clinic to accept tax-deductible donations and apply for grants.
- Resource: IRS 501(c)(3) Application

Step 4: Secure Funding

- Apply for grants from healthcare foundations, local government, and organizations such as the National Association of Free & Charitable Clinics (NAFC). Leverage community donations and fundraisers to ensure financial sustainability.

Step 5: Find a Location and Equipment

- Choose a central and accessible location for the clinic. You can seek donated spaces in community centers, religious institutions, or schools. Solicit donations of medical equipment from hospitals or medical suppliers, or purchase at discounted rates.

Step 6: Set Up Governance

- Recruit a Board of Directors, consisting of healthcare professionals, legal advisors, and community leaders who can oversee clinic operations and guide strategic decisions.



Liability Protection Options

Sovereign Immunity through Florida's Volunteer Provider Program (VPP)

- Eligibility: Nonprofit clinics with volunteer providers.
- Cost: Free for volunteer providers.
- Coverage: Capped at \$200,000 per person and \$300,000 per incident.

Federal Tort Claims Act (FTCA) for Free Clinics

- Eligibility: Nonprofit clinics offering free or nominal-fee services can qualify.
- Cost: Free, but requires compliance with federal guidelines.
- Coverage: Comprehensive protection, covering both volunteers and paid staff with legal defense provided by the federal government.

Private Medical Malpractice Insurance

- Eligibility: Any clinic can purchase this coverage for additional protection.
- Cost: Premiums vary depending on the clinic's size and operations.
- Coverage: Flexible and customizable coverage for both paid and volunteer staff.

Sample Bylaws for a Free Clinic

ARTICLE I: NAME AND PURPOSE

- Name: [Name of Clinic].
- Purpose: To provide free healthcare services to underserved populations.

ARTICLE II: OFFICE

- The principal office of the clinic shall be located at [Address].

ARTICLE III: MEMBERSHIP

- The clinic will not have members; all decision-making authority rests with the Board of Directors.

ARTICLE IV: BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- Powers: The Board manages the clinic's affairs.
- Number of Directors: [Number of board members].
- Meetings: The Board will meet [number] times per year.

ARTICLE V: OFFICERS

- The clinic will have a Chair, Vice-Chair, Secretary, and Treasurer.

ARTICLE VI: COMMITTEES

- Standing committees include Finance, Quality Assurance, and Fundraising.

ARTICLE VII: FISCAL POLICIES

- The fiscal year of the clinic begins on [date].

ARTICLE VIII: INDEMNIFICATION

- The clinic indemnifies Board members to the fullest extent permitted by law.

ARTICLE IX: AMENDMENTS

- Bylaws may be amended by a two-thirds vote of the Board.

Job Descriptions for Key Paid Staff at a Free Clinic

Executive Director

- Responsibilities: Oversee operations, strategic planning, fundraising, and financial management.
- Qualifications: Bachelor's degree in healthcare management or nonprofit administration; Master's preferred.

Medical Director

- Responsibilities: Supervise clinical staff, maintain healthcare standards, and ensure regulatory compliance.
- Qualifications: MD or DO with a current medical license.

Clinic Manager

- Responsibilities: Oversee daily operations, scheduling, and patient flow.
- Qualifications: Bachelor's degree in healthcare administration.

Nurse Practitioner (NP)

- Responsibilities: Provide direct patient care, including diagnosis and treatment.
- Qualifications: Master's in Nursing, NP certification, and state licensure.

Development and Fundraising Manager

- Responsibilities: Lead grant writing, donor engagement, and fundraising campaigns.
- Qualifications: Bachelor's in nonprofit management or marketing.

Administrative Assistant

- Responsibilities: Manage patient intake, record-keeping, and scheduling.
- Qualifications: High school diploma with administrative experience.

Volunteer Healthcare Provider Recruitment

Define Roles and Expectations

- Clearly outline the specialties needed, time commitments, and expectations for volunteer healthcare providers (e.g., physicians, nurses, dentists). This ensures clarity in recruitment and operations.

Create a Recruitment Plan

- Target Audiences: Reach out to retired healthcare professionals, professionals seeking to give back, and healthcare workers with spare time.
- Leverage Networks: Partner with local hospitals, medical societies, and professional organizations like the American Medical Association (AMA) or Florida Medical Association (FMA).
- Use Digital Channels: Post opportunities on your clinic's website and social media platforms. Email campaigns can also be effective in reaching targeted providers.

Promote Volunteer Benefits

- Personal Fulfillment: Emphasize the satisfaction of serving underserved populations.
- Professional Growth: Highlight Continuing Medical Education (CME) credits and opportunities for professional development.
- Liability Protection: Mention that volunteer healthcare providers are eligible for Sovereign Immunity or FTCA protection, limiting their personal liability.

Host Recruitment Events

- Organize virtual and in-person information sessions where prospective volunteers can learn about the clinic, meet current volunteers, and tour the facility.



Attracting Student Volunteers

Offer Practical Experience

- Partner with local universities and medical schools to provide internships or clinical rotations for students studying medicine, nursing, public health, and social work. Student volunteers gain hands-on experience while supporting clinic operations.

Leverage Partnerships with Schools

- Formal Agreements: Establish partnerships with local schools to provide course credit for volunteering at the clinic.
- Health Fairs: Participate in university health fairs to recruit student volunteers.

Engage Students in Special Projects

- Offer students opportunities to lead projects such as organizing health education workshops or conducting community health assessments.

Provide Mentorship and Training

- Offer mentorship programs where experienced healthcare providers guide student volunteers. Training in clinical skills, patient interaction, and community health helps students develop professionally.

Flexible Volunteer Scheduling

- Since students have busy schedules, provide flexible hours or weekend opportunities to accommodate their academic commitments.

National Resources for Free Prescriptions & Other Services

Prescription Assistance Programs

- Partnership for Prescription Assistance (PPA)
 - Offers access to free or low-cost medications for low-income patients through pharmaceutical companies.
 - Website: www.pparx.org
- RxAssist
 - Provides a database of patient assistance programs for free or discounted medications.
 - Website: www.rxassist.org
- NeedyMeds
 - Offers prescription discount cards and information on free clinics.
 - Website: www.needymeds.org

Medical Supply and Equipment Donation Programs

- MedShare
 - Collects surplus medical supplies and equipment for distribution to free clinics.
 - Website: www.medshare.org
- Project C.U.R.E.
 - Provides donated medical supplies to underserved communities, including free clinics.
 - Website: www.projectcure.org

Additional Resources

- National Association of Free & Charitable Clinics (NAFC)
 - Offers grants, resources, and technical assistance for free clinics.
 - Website: www.nafcclinics.org
- Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA)
 - Provides resources for clinics on FTCA protection and healthcare delivery.
 - Website: www.hrsa.gov



Conclusion

Starting and operating a free clinic requires careful planning, strategic partnerships, and a well-organized volunteer network. By following this guide, clinic leaders can ensure they have the necessary legal protections, qualified staff, and resources to meet the healthcare needs of underserved communities.

Utilizing national resources for prescriptions, medical supplies, and equipment can reduce operational costs and enhance patient care. With a strong focus on recruiting healthcare providers and student volunteers, clinics can build a sustainable model of care while also contributing to the professional growth of future

