

SI Handbook 2015



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I. Introduction to the SI Handbook 2015

Servas has put a priority on implementing a new world-wide on-line website ServasOnline. The intention is to implement it in 2016.

The effect of implementing ServasOnline will be to transform Servas from being an organization in which Servas members are identified as belonging to a particular country, to an organization with world-wide Servas members who happen to live in a particular country.

It is not clear where this change will lead.

Certain changes are quite likely:

- Revisions to the Servas International Statutes
- Revision to the role and members of the Servas International Executive (SI Exco)
- Revision of the finances and budgeting model for Servas International
- Revision of roles within individual Servas countries
- Revisions to the communications, which are also heavily affected by the growing use of social media

Because of these imminent changes, the SI Handbook will also change.

However, since it has not been updated since 2000, this version is intended to fill the gap until the future for Servas is better defined, and the new organization can be described with more certainty.

II. Scope of SI Handbook

The handbook of Servas International is a guide to the procedures for officials of Servas International and the reference document on Servas procedures for National Groups. It contains recommendations of the way things should be done in the organization and provides the basis for implementing the statutes of the organization. The SI Handbook is regulated by the Statutes of Servas International.

III. General Servas Information

1. What is Servas

Servas is an Esperanto word, meaning 'serving'. Servas was founded in 1949 by Bob Luitweiler as a peace movement working to build understanding, tolerance and world peace. Servas has a presence in over 130 countries around the world.

For more information and background on Bob Luitweiler's vision, go to www.servas.org and click on 'Our Philosophy' on the left side of the main page.

SERVAS is a non-profit, non-political, inter-faith and interracial system of hosts and travellers, whose goal is to promote peace and understanding between people by providing opportunities for deeper, more personal contacts between different cultures. It offers approved travellers of all ages the opportunity to meet and/or have short stays (normally 2 nights) with hosts in the country they're visiting. Travellers should not expect luxury accommodation, nor to be entertained, but to share in the everyday life of the host. Each participating group has a list of hosts and the traveller arranges their own visits directly with the hosts. You can choose the hosts whose interests and beliefs are most interesting to you. You can also become a host and welcome travellers into your home. Both hosts and travellers are sincerely interested in learning about other cultures and have an adaptable personality. An interview is required and there is a participation fee.

Through SERVAS, travellers have opportunities to meet hosts, their families and friends in their everyday life. SERVAS hosts have opportunities to bring travelers from around the world into their homes and lives.

2. Servas International Slogan, Mission and Vision

Slogan:

Proposed SI slogan is 'Open doors – building peace and understanding across cultures'.

Core Values:

Proposed Core Values are 'Trust, Tolerance, Open Mindedness, Respect'.

Mission:

'Servas promotes trust, tolerance, open-mindedness and respect, so that people can live in peaceful coexistence. Our members value understanding of different cultures, gender equality and diversity in ethnicity, ideology, sexuality and nationality.

In times of increased movement of people and globalization, there is a growing need to promote understanding across borders and cultures.

Hospitality and cultural interaction are the essential tools for achieving conditions for people to live in peace // unity // concordance'.

3. Servas Hosts and Travellers

Hosts and travellers are the essential parts of Servas.

People who want to be a member of Servas are interviewed to inform them about the purpose and structure of the organization, and to confirm that their interests align with those of Servas. The experiences, knowledge and curiosity of the hosts and travellers are the essential ingredients for the communication between them.

Hosts and travellers are expected to spend time together, and to share with an open-mind and in a respectful way. Differences in race, religion and nationality provide opportunities for both hosts and travelers to expand their knowledge and understanding. It is obligatory to agree with the purpose and rules of Servas.

4. Hosts

Hosts welcome travelers. Names and addresses of hosts, and some information about them including the languages that they speak and their interests, appear in host lists, which are available to approved travellers.

Hosts who are not able to provide overnight accommodation can join as Day Hosts. A Day Host will find a convenient time to meet the traveller, may provide information or a guided tour, or a work-place visit or a meal, or just find time for a chat together.

Most hosts provide accommodation for two nights and invite the traveller to share the meals. Sometimes the traveller will cook for the host or take him out for a snack or meal. The host is not expected to provide transport. The host is encouraged to say 'no' if the visit is not convenient.

Each country decides if hosts will pay a fee to be Servas hosts. Often host gatherings will be arranged.

5. Travellers

Travellers bring their experiences, knowledge and curiosity to the Servas hosts who they visit.

Each adult traveller receives a Letter of Introduction which is signed, stamped and dated, and is the traveller's 'passport' in Servas. If the traveller is travelling with children, they are listed on an adult's Letter of Introduction. The Letter of Introduction is valid for one year after the date of issue. The interviewer also arranges for Host Lists for the places that the traveler is visiting.

Each country fixes its own Letter of Introduction fee.

is expected that the traveller will show their Letter of Introduction to their host or day host when they meet.

If a Host List is not available in advance, it can be requested in the destination country, by showing the stamped Letter of Introduction.

At the end of a trip, the traveller should write a short travel report to their country, listing the hosts that have been stayed with, noting any changes of address or telephone number, as well as any difficulties in contacting hosts and giving advice that may be useful to other travellers.

General traveller requirements and responsibilities (there are some differences between countries):

- A traveller must be 18 years of age or over. Children can travel with parents (some country offer Youth visits, which must be arranged between the youth's parents and each host)
- Travellers may be asked to provide 2 letters of reference
- Each adult needs a letter of introduction
- A Servas stamp is fixed on each Letter of Introduction; validity is for ONE year
- Servas officers are all volunteers, and so travellers need to allow time to complete the interview process and receive their approved Letter of Introduction
- Normally, a traveller joins Servas in their home country; exceptionally, you can become a member abroad.
- Travellers use the host lists to arrange a visit. They are encouraged to look through the host list and when they contact the prospective host or day host, to say why they are interested in meeting them and/or staying with them. Individual email should be sent, not mass emails. Note that some hosts or day hosts may not read their email every day.
- Remember that there is no obligation for the hosts to accommodate travellers. Especially in big cities and touristic places, they may get many requests. Servas hosts or day hosts are also likely to be involved in other organizations and activities and may not always be available. Travellers should not rely on finding Servas hosts in every location. It's about sharing ideas and experiences you wouldn't have if you were on your own, getting to know another culture.
- Bring pictures from your country and home life to share, or small items for your host or day host; sometimes hosts appreciate sharing cooking responsibilities with travellers.
- Be considerate of your hosts, in your approach and behaviour. Don't call them early in the morning or late in the evening. Don't smoke unless their host listing indicates that it is OK.
- Day hosts normally don't give accommodation but can meet you. Sometimes the day host likes to meet the traveller(s) outside of his house, and then decide if they will invite the traveller to their home or not. Often Day Hosts have more time to spend with travellers.

6. The Servas Community

Servas members often gather for local events, such as ‘pot luck’ meals, hikes, visits to local points of interest, or simply at a regular time in a local restaurant or pub.

Servas groups can also be found on social media sites.

In addition to group contact, individual Servas members often maintain very strong friendships even if they see each other very rarely. This person to person linkage is the essence of Servas.

7. Peace Activities

Servas originated as “Peace Builders”, and peace has remained a unique aspect of Servas membership. Peacebuilding focuses on creating a long-term culture of peace. Peacebuilding activities aim at building understanding and tolerance between individuals, communities and societies and establishing new structures of cooperation.

One of the six Servas International Executive Committee positions is the Peace Secretary.

His or her responsibilities include coordinating the work of national Peace Secretaries, promoting the peace aspect of Servas International in national groups and internationally, encouraging liaison with other peace organizations as well as arranging representation in such organizations when appropriate, and representing the interests of the national Peace Secretaries in the Executive Committee.

The Peace Secretary encourages Servas National Groups to develop strategies and action plans for Servas outreach and cooperation with other organizations with similar values and goals, promoting Servas values including tolerance, open mindedness, building friendship, peace, and nonviolence. The Peace Secretary encourages Servas National Groups to nominate National Peace Secretaries and share peace activities with all Servas members. National groups are encouraged to report regularly on peace activities in their country to the Peace Secretary who then distributes the information widely to all national groups.

Servas has been accredited with the United Nations since 1973, and has representatives in Geneva, Vienna and New York. This accreditation gives Servas a certain number of rights, but also responsibilities, including that of widening knowledge of the work of the UN and, so far as is possible, of implementing UN decisions. The Peace Secretary encourages National Groups to inform on the work of Servas UN representatives and on UN activities generally. One of the responsibilities of the Peace Secretary is to support the work of Servas representatives at the UN and represent their interests in the Executive Committee.

IV. Servas International

1. Servas International Structure

Servas International is a federation of Servas National Groups. Anyone can start a Servas National Group if one does not already exist in their country. Support is provided by the Development Committee (development@servas.org)

There are Servas International Statutes which defines how the Servas National Groups link together: [SI Statutes 2012](#). The following are the sections in the statutes:

- I. Definition
- II. Membership
- III Officers
- IV General Assembly
- V Executive Committee
- VI Voting at Meetings
- VII Distant Voting
- VIII Duties and Responsibilities of Officers
- IX Dissolution
- X Amendment of Statutes

Servas International makes decisions at General Assemblies and through Distant Votes.

Voting members of the Servas International federation are called Member Groups. Each Member Group has one vote. The statutes define the requirements for a country to be a member group. Member groups are added and removed by decisions made at a General Assembly or Distant Vote.

2. Servas International Decision Making

General Assembly

- Servas International holds a General Assembly normally every three years. Normally the General Assembly is part of a larger Servas International conference
- Each Member Group may send one delegate to the General Assembly, normally the National Secretary
- Member Groups who are not present at a General Assembly may vote by proxy
- Decisions are made by 1 vote per Member Group present.
- The President of Servas International is responsible for the General Assembly
- Normally, a Member Group is selected by SI EXCO to host the event. The selection criteria, developed at the 2001 General Assembly are:
 1. Rotation (conferences should be held in different areas of the world in the course of time)
 2. Health standards

3. Safety standards
 4. Immigration (passports and visas)
 5. Accessibility (travel to and from)
 6. Adequate infrastructure (communications, roads, hospitals etc.)
 7. Feasibility study on costs
 8. Sufficient local Servas people to help organize
 9. Consider potential developing in the area
 10. Adequate conference facilities
- Normally, some funds are available to support attendance at the General Assembly, in an effort to allow as many as possible to attend. There are funding criteria published before every General Assembly.
 - For example, at the 2012 General Assembly, it was decided that “Any countries requesting SI funding must be surveyed, and their Host List must be at least 70% reliable and fit into the standard format defined by SI HL Coordinator.”

Distant Vote

- Between General Assemblies, Distant Votes are used to make decisions. This is defined in the statutes.
- Each Member Group has one distant vote.
- Two months after a General Assembly, the SI EXCO publishes a schedule of Distant Votes.
- In each calendar year between general assemblies, at least one distant vote shall be held to vote on the annual accounts, auditor's report and any changes to the budget
- The Distant Vote process is managed by the Distant Vote Administrator and the Servas International General Secretary.

3. Servas International Positions and Committees

- Servas International Positions and Committees, appointed positions and committees and ad hoc working groups
- Only the EXCO members are required by the statutes to be elected by the General Assembly.
 - Servas International Executive Committee (SI EXCO)
 - President
 - Vice President
 - Treasurer
 - General Secretary
 - Peace Secretary
 - Host List Coordinator
- All other officers and committee members can be either elected by the GA or appointed by EXCO, if the GA authorizes EXCO to make these appointments.

- Current practice is to elect the following committees at the General Assembly:
 - Archivist
 - Audit Committee
 - Conflict Resolution Committee
 - Development Committee
 - Distant Vote Administrator
 - Job Descriptions and Statutes Committee
 - Newsletter Editor
 - Nominations Committee
 - Youth Committee
- Current practice is for SI EXCO to appoint the following positions and committees:
 - Budget Committee
 - Dolphin Team
 - Help Desk
 - Information and Communications Team (ICT)
 - Membership Committee
 - Staff Helper
 - UN Observers
- Job Descriptions can be found at [Job Descriptions](#)
- Area Coordinators are elected by the member countries in the area. These elections are not held at General Assemblies, and are usually done electronically. See [AC Guidelines and Election Rules \(Eng\)](#) or [AC Guidelines and Election Rules \(esp\)](#).

4. Servas International Processes and Operations

- Day to day operational decisions are made by the SI EXCO, based on decisions made at General Assemblies and through Distant Votes.

Language

- The most widespread language in Servas is English. Servas International information is given in English. But it is not necessary to be fluent in English to be in Servas. The second most common language used is Spanish, and some documents have been translated into Spanish
- At the 2015 General Assembly, it was decided:
 - “It is agreed to include Spanish as a language used in communication in Servas International, with a budget of 10000 CHF for the first year, to be reviewed, and to appoint a coordinator

Servas Areas and Area Coordinators

- Some part of the world have Servas Area Coordinators
- Servas National Groups have the option to request an Area Coordinator
- SI EXCO coordinates reviews of areas and area coordinator elections at the request of the member groups in the area

Annual Member Group Requirements

- Annual Report – form distributed by General Secretary, due March 31
- Annual financial report and stamp payment form distributed by Treasurer – due March 31
- Annual request for stamps for the new year – due December 31
- Annual Host List updates – no specific due date, but at least every 12 months
- Distribute SI News to hosts and travelers within the country
- Keep the Key contact information and email forwarding up to date

Servas International Technology

- Servas international is transitioning to a single system, ServasOnline, which will be reached by the web page: www.servas.org. It is scheduled for implementation in 2016.
- Currently, the website www.servas.org contains basic information about Servas international, and links to specific countries through which a person can join Servas.
- The current computer system is the Dolphin system. Dolphin is a secure system, and requires a user name and password. It is managed by a volunteer group (dolphin.team@servas.org)
 - Key Dolphin is used to handle key contacts. Each National Group has an email address of the format 'country@servas.org' which is forwarded to key people in that country. It is anticipated that Key Dolphin will be integrated into the new ServasOnline system in the future
 - Currently, each country manages their own list of hosts. Key Dolphin facilitates the sharing of host lists by storing them in the Dolphin Host List Storage Area. (Each country defines how their host list data may be used and shared with travelers (decision GA 2006))
- Some countries have their own computer systems, and over 25 countries use the services of the international system Host Dolphin to manage their host data.
- Each country decides how to manage their own host and traveler information, finances, etc. In some cases, countries collaborate or share their ideas and systems.
- The General Assembly in 2009, and again in 2012 made it a priority to create a new ServasOnLine computer system to manage all host and traveler information and interactions world-wide.

Servas International Newsletters

- SI News is produced periodically throughout the year, depending upon submissions received

Servas International Conflict Resolution

- There is a Servas International Conflict Resolution Committee, which can be used to help parties resolve differences

Servas Youth Language Experience (SYLE)

- This is program run by the Youth Committee, where a young person goes to another country to learn the language and culture
- There is an application and selection process
- Hosting countries work with the Youth Committee to arrange locations where SYLEs occur
- Work is underway to extend this program to adults and for cultural experiences

5. Servas International Financial Processes

- A three or four year Servas International budget is approved at each General Assembly. The annual budgets are approved by Distant Vote. A Budget Committee works with the treasurer to develop the update the budget.
- The elected Servas International Treasurer manages the Servas international finances
- An elected Servas International Audit Committee handles internal audit each year, and an accounting firm doe an annual external audit.
- Income is mainly from stamp payments. Stamp fees are:
 - first 10 stamps – CHF 0 per stamp
 - 11 to 50 stamps – CHF 10 per stamp
 - 51 to 300 stamps – CHF 15 per stamp
 - 301 to 550 stamps – CHF 18 per stamp
 - 551 and above stamps – CHF 20 per stamp
- Funding requests for area meetings and committees are sent to SI EXCO for approval (exco@servas.org)
- Funding requests for development activities are sent to the Development Committee (development@servas.org)
- All money collected in the name of Servas must be used for Servas purposes only. No one is allowed to collect money in the name of Servas for personal use.
- It is strongly recommended that a statement of Income and Expenses should be submitted by a treasurer or designated person to the country's members at least annually and/or on request (decision GA 2012).

V. National Groups

1. National Group - definition

- A national group is a Servas organization in a country where there is one or more contact people who:
 - take responsibility for representing Servas in that country
 - interview hosts and travellers
 - coordinate the production of a host list
 - receiving emails for that country and responding to queries
 - manage the finances of the national group

2. Member Group - definition

- A Member Group is a National Group that meets the Servas International statutory requirements to be a Member Group
- Applications for National Groups to become Member Groups are considered at General Assemblies and through Distant Votes. Applications are sent to the Membership Committee (membership@servas.org)
- Each Member Group has one vote at a General Assembly or in a Distant Vote
- The main contact person for a Member Group is the National Secretary
- The following definition of a Member Group is taken from the Servas International Statutes approved in August 2012:

II Membership

1) Any national Servas group containing ten or more personally confirmed hosts (including day-hosts) and three defined contact persons, may become, or be reinstated as, a member group of Servas International by a majority vote of the General Assembly. One host is defined as one household sharing the same home address. A group may be proposed for membership by

- a) direct application by the group; or
- b) recommendation from a Servas International Area Coordinator or Committee; or
- c) invitation from the General Assembly.

2) The obligations of a member group to Servas International consist of, and are limited to, paying fees, doing annual host list updates, submitting annual reports, and of following the regulations and procedures as decided by the General Assembly according to Section IV, 3f of the statutes.

3) Except under special circumstances, A member group will lose its membership in Servas International by majority vote of the General Assembly if

- a) it has been without a functioning national secretary for two consecutive years; or
- b) it has fewer hosts than in subsection 1) above for two consecutive years; or
- c) it does not fulfil its obligations for two consecutive years.

3. National Group Structure

- Each National Group defines the way it is organized and run, as long as it meets its Servas International responsibilities.
- A National Group must have a National Secretary or Main Contact person who is the representative person of the National Group
- Some National Groups:
 - are registered or incorporated
 - have constitutions

- have Boards of Directors or Executive teams
- hold elections
- are divided into regions
- have a team of interviewers or host coordinators
- have active outreach programs
- are run by a single person
- Financial structures also differ. Each National Group:
 - pays the calculated stamp fee to Servas International
 - manages their own finances
 - defines how much a traveller must pay
 - defines how much a host must pay
 - decides if and how they will fund-raise
 - decides what their funds are used for within the National Group

4. National Group Roles

- Depending on the size of the National Group, one or more people will handle the responsibilities of running the organization
- The key person in each Member Group is the National Secretary. Different countries use different titles internally, but the Servas International role is called National Secretary.
- National Groups that are being established, or do not meet the criteria to be a Member Group, are led by either a National Secretary or a Main Contact.
- The following are typical roles that might be defined in a larger National Group
 - National Secretary
 - Deputy National Secretary
 - Treasurer
 - Host List Coordinator
 - Peace Secretary
 - Interviewers
 - Regional Host Coordinators

5. National Group Tasks

- Hosts:
 - Each National Group interviews, approves and documents the hosts in their country, and organizes that information so that travelers in all other countries can use it.
 - Each National Group produces and distributes a host list, updating it at least annually. Host lists are stored in the Dolphin Host List Storage Area, which can be accessed by key people in each country.
 - There is a standardized Servas database, Dolphin, which can be used to manage host data. The Dolphin Team is ready to help (dolphin.team@servas.org)

- Travellers:
 - Each National Group interviews, approves and stamps a traveller Letter of Introduction for travellers from their country, and provides the traveler with host lists for the countries to which he/she is travelling.
 - On the Letter of Introduction, a Servas International stamp is attached. Stamps are provided by the SI Treasurer (treasurer@servas.org) .
 - Host lists are found in the Dolphin Host List Storage Area. For help contact the SI host list coordinator (hostlistcoordinator@servas.org)
- Newsletters and Publicity:
 - Each National Group distributes the Servas International Newsletters (SINews) to all Servas members in your country. See <http://www.servas.org/who-we-are-newsletter.php>
 - Many National Groups also produce a newsletter for their group, and may share it with other National Groups
 - People who experienced Servas give the best publicity.

6. Establishing a National Group

- The Development Committee will support the establishment of a National Group, by providing information and mentors (development@servas.org)
[Starter Kit for establishers](#)

VI. Guidelines for Servas volunteers

There are out-of-date instructions in the 2000 Handbook, which may still be useful.

Currently, all of the major countries have developed their own rules, which are mostly similar to the 2000 Handbook. However, since ServasOnLine is planned and will have a major effect on all of the guidelines, it seems better to simply point to the 2000 Handbook, and then replace all of these guidelines once ServasOnLine is implemented.

1. Handling Queries

- Expectation management
 - Next steps
- [Servas Information for enquirers 2000 SI Handbook](#)

2. Information for Hosts

[Servas Information for hosts 2000 SI Handbook](#)

3. Information for Travellers

[Servas Information for travelers 2000 SI Handbook](#)

4. Guidelines for Interviewing Hosts and Travellers

- Preparation for the interview: Before the interview – handouts, information
 - At the interview – assessment, references, handouts, information
 - Expectation management
 - Practical discussion points
- [Servas Information for Interviewers 2000 SI Handbook](#)
[Servas Interviewing Guide 2000 SI Handbook](#)

VII. Sample Forms

All countries are different! As a sample, the following are forms used by Servas Canada, in English and French, at <http://canada.servas.org/>.

1. Host Registration

- [Host data](#)
- [Host responsibilities \(Eng\)](#) [Host responsibilities \(Fra\)](#)
- [Privacy consent \(Eng\)](#) [Privacy consent \(Fra\)](#)

2. Traveller Letter of Introduction

- [Letter of Introduction](#)
- [Traveller responsibilities \(Eng\)](#) [Traveller responsibilities \(Fra\)](#)
- [Privacy of host data \(Eng\)](#) [Privacy of host data \(Fra\)](#)

3. General Information

- General Information (<http://canada.servas.org/>)

4. Travel Report

- Travel Report (no sample available at this time)

APPENDIX A: Programs for which Funding may be Available

- Outreach grants – up to US\$200; Peace Secretary (decision GA 2009)
- Small grants for new groups – up to US\$200; Development Committee (decision GA 2009)
- Small grants for existing groups – up to US\$200; Development Committee (decision GA 2009)
- Grants for meetings with specific purposes in line with Servas ideals – by application; Development Committee (decision GA 2009)
- Area meeting – dependent on budget – apply to SI EXCO
- Special interest meetings – e.g. Youth meetings, focal meetings – apply to SI EXCO

APPENDIX B: Approved Contracts

- External Auditors – managed by Treasurer (in Statutes)
- If at any time there is no qualified Servas International Treasurer, then SI EXCO may hire and pay a temporary accountant – managed by Treasurer (decision GA 2006)
- If there is no qualified volunteer System Administrator, then SI EXCO may hire and pay one up to CHF1000 per year; managed by ICT (decision GA 2012)
- All business relations between Servas International and vendors or service providers shall be based on a written agreement approved by EXCO or by a committee authorized by EXCO to approve such agreements, if the value of the goods or services to be procured exceeds CHF 500 (decision GA 2012).
- ServasOnline: Design – completed in 2014; Development – 2015-2016

APPENDIX C: General Assembly and Distant Vote Decisions

In reverse chronological order:

- [2015 GA Decisions](#)
- [Distant Vote Nov 2014](#)
- [Distant Vote Nov 2013](#)
- [2012 GA Minutes](#)
- [2012 GA Decisions](#)
- [Distant Vote Nov 2011](#)
- [Distant Vote Nov 2010](#)
- [2009 GA Minutes](#)
- [2006 GA Minutes](#)
- [2004 GA Minutes](#)
- previous GAs up to 2001

[2001 GA Minutes](#)
[1998 GA Minutes](#)
[1995 GA Minutes](#)
[1992 GA Minutes](#)
[1989 GA Minutes](#)
[1986 GA Minutes](#)
[1983 GA Minutes](#)
[1980 GA Minutes](#)
[1978 GA Minutes](#)
[1974 GA Minutes](#)
[1972 GA Minutes](#)
[1970 GA Minutes](#)
[1967 GA Minutes](#)
[1966 GA Minutes](#)
[1965 GA Minutes](#)
[1964-1970 GA Highlights](#)