



Mimi's Handbook for Dollmakers

Starting a Dollclub

by Gloria J. "Mimi" Winer

How Do I Begin?

The first thing that you need to form a dollmaking club is people who want to be members. There are plenty of them out there: the hard part is finding them.

- Decide if you want your club to be dollmakers who make only cloth dolls, or only sculpted dolls, or only paper dolls, or all kinds of dolls. Keep in mind that dollmakers who make reproduction porcelain dolls usually have their own clubs, sponsored by the local ceramics store, because their techniques, technology, and markets are very specialized.
- Start by advertising in your local paper. Most newspapers give free listings for non-profit groups in their "What's Happening", or "Date Line" columns. Put notices or flyers in doll shops or other places where they may be seen by doll lovers. Also place flyers in fabric and craft shops, quilt shops, or anywhere crafters and dollmakers may go to buy supplies.
- Another good idea is to ask on the on-line (computer) doll clubs to find out if there are any doll makers who live near you.

Important: Tell people where to call you to RSVP. Don't depend on them just showing up somewhere, and don't depend on them writing to you. Invite the people who are interested to meet at your home (or at a fabric, craft, quilt, or other store — talk to the manager). To help people get acquainted, ask each person to bring along something that will help them talk about what they want to accomplish by forming a dollmaking club. For example, a list of patterns or books that they have explored or want to explore, or a doll that they have made.

Don't be disappointed if not many show up — two people are enough to start a club. (It will grow.)

Since you issued the invitation, you're in charge until the club gets organized. Begin with introductions and "show and tell." You, or somebody who volunteered ahead-of-time, should go first. Let the others know by your example that it is okay to talk about your work, and interests, and goals. When you have everybody talking, have a good long discussion of what everyone wants to accomplish.

At your first meeting, you only have one thing that you must do: select a time and place for the next meeting. Anything else you accomplish beyond that is gravy. A first meeting is also a good time to talk about a club name and perhaps a club doll—one that your members make as a symbol for the club. This will help to define what everyone's ideas are. (You can even have each member make her own variation on your club doll.)

When you have a group that wants to form a club, you need to make several decisions, but not all of them have to be made at the first meeting. You have immediate agreement, or you may wind up having different groups look into each question and report back at the next meeting.

- How often to meet? The whole club should meet at least once a month, but you may want to meet more often. You may have part of the club (or even several groups) that meet weekly with everybody getting together at a general meeting once a month.
- Where to meet? You can meet in a public place or in someone's home. If you meet in a home, you will need to decide whether to meet in the same place each time (if someone has a particularly good place to work), or if you will rotate to a different club member's home each meeting.

To find a public meeting place, check with your local library, school, or town hall. Some civic organizations or churches make meeting space available for a small fee or a donation to their favorite fund or charity.

Many stores, particularly those that sell dollmaking supplies, may be interested in having your club meet at the store if there is space.

- How to handle refreshments? You can have everybody bring something, or you can take up a collection (or charge dues) to help pay for coffee and snacks at your meetings.
- How to handle special projects: Your club may want to make dolls for the homeless children at Christmas or become involved in another project.
- What to name the club? Your club will need a name. It helps to provide a feeling of belonging. The Flying Phoebes is named after one of Elinor Peace Bailey's dolls. Some other clubs are named after the cities or towns where they meet.

- Whether to Have a Newsletter? Do you want to send minutes of the meetings to the members? Do you want to share techniques in written form, Do you have somebody who wants the job and will actually do it?

What About Officers?

And lastly, you will need to decide how to organize your club. The reason that I have left this for last is that while you are discussing the other decisions, you will find out who the natural leaders are and what direction the club members want to go. If you decide that you want to be formal and have officers and bylaws, you will know who is interested and who is good at getting things done. Generally, it's a good idea to designate somebody to be in charge for the following reasons:

- So that discussions are orderly and don't go on forever.
- So that somebody specific can represent the club in dealing with other organizations.

For some clubs, this may be a formally elected President. For other clubs, it will just be somebody that everyone will listen to, and that everyone feels is a good representative of the club.

Get a book on simplified parliamentary procedure. Robert's Rules is far too complicated. There are better books available. (If somebody has a good recommendation, please let me know.)

What Do We Do About Money and Dues?

If nothing else, you should have somebody specific in charge of keeping track of the club's money, and you should have specific procedures for voting on and approving expenditures before the money is spent. This person is usually the Treasurer. You do not need to go through the formality of incorporating as a not-for-profit organization. Just find somebody you trust and ask them to open a separate account for the club. The account can be in the name of the club. If your club does fund raising events, you may also want a Fund Raising Committee that will need a Chairperson. Fund raising events can be as simple as a raffle at each meeting, or as complicated as putting on a doll show and sale.

If you are going to order dollmaking supplies as a group to take advantage of quantity discounts and club discounts, you will also need someone who is in charge of getting the orders together and collecting the money. (See Cooperative Buying discussed later.) Dues aren't

really necessary unless you have something that you want to spend the money on. Things that require money are:

- Renting meeting space.
- Sending out a newsletter (copying and postage).
- Doing charity projects.
- Sending birthday cards to members or sending flowers when someone is in the hospital.
- Buying refreshments for meetings.
- Establishing a club library of patterns, videos, or dollmaking books that all members can use.

If you decide to have dues, don't make them too expensive. A dollar a month (paid yearly) is a good starting figure.

Another thing about dues is that people who don't come to meetings regularly don't like to pay them. This means that members who don't contribute to the activities of the club will probably drop out, instead of staying forever if they didn't have to pay dues.

You may want to have two classes of members, Active Members and Associate Members. Active Members are allowed to participate in everything, but pay higher dues. Associate Members are limited in what they can participate in, and may not have to (or be allowed to) come to as many meetings, but they pay lower dues. I am an Associate Member in some clubs just to receive their newsletter — the clubs are located in other cities so I can't go to meetings.

Do We Need a Corporation or Bylaws?

You do not need to incorporate as a not-for-profit organization unless your club is very large and has lots of money. It's much easier if you are more informal. If the club gets too large and rich, it may lose sight of its purpose of dollmaking.

You may want to adapt bylaws or standing rules. Some examples of rules follow. Your club may not need any of these rules.

- If your club meets in member's homes, you may want to limit the size of your club.
- You may want to require that members attend at least some number of meetings a year to remain active members.
- You may want to establish different classes of members such as Active Members and Associate Members.

What About Board Meetings?

When you find that business is taking up too much of your dollmaking time at meetings, form a Board of Directors. The Board meets occasionally to take care of excess business matters so that regular meetings can be devoted to dollmaking subjects. By the time that your club has enough business to need a Board, you will know how to set it up—just meet your club's needs in a democratic way.

Cooperative Buying:

On of the advantages of forming a dollmaking club is cooperative buying. If you all get together and order at the same time, you can save money by getting quantity discounts.

Holding Classes:

Within your own membership you will often find somebody who wants to help teach other dollmakers. You can hold classes given by your members on subjects like wiggling, painting faces, stuffing, costuming, or whatever someone would like to share.

As a dollmakers' club, you can hold seminars. Most well known artists who teach will travel and teach in your town. You have to contact the artist and ask for a class outline, her fees and expense rates, and determine who supplies materials. There is a great deal of coordination involved but it is do-able. If you need help setting up a seminar, I will tell you how to do it in another article soon. I used to run seminars with visiting artists once a month in my studio in Point Pleasant, New Jersey.

Some Ideas from Other Clubs:

The most active dollmaking clubs I have found are the Flying Phoebes in the San Francisco Bay Area, the Imitation of Life Construction Company in San Diego, CA, and the Sisters of the Cloth, Order of the Flying Needle in Huntington Beach, CA. These clubs are always doing exciting shows, sales, design projects and seminars. I am an Associate Member of them all, which means that I get their newsletter and don't fly across the country for the meetings.

The Flying Phoebes came up with the idea of a Friendship Doll that is sort of like round-robin story telling with everyone talking at once. Everyone in the group made a doll body and brought it to the meeting in a paper bag with a number on it. Numbers were drawn from a hat and the dolls were swapped to whoever drew their number. Those

dollmakers got to put the head and face on the doll. The next time, it was hair, then underwear, clothing, accessories, and environment. They had great fun. (Eventually the dolls went to charity.)

Another good idea from the Flying Phoebes was a door prize at each meeting. Whoever won got to bring the door prize for the next meeting.

Other Suggestions:

If you have any other ideas that you would like to share, please email me and I will include them the next time that I update this article. Email me at: <mimi@mimidolls.com>.