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## **Impact of Transparency**

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“There’s an association for that,” is often heard. Most of them represent professions, trades, communities or causes. An NGO (non-governmental organization) deserving our respect is the Lebanese Transparency Association (LTA).

LTA is a chapter of Transparency International. With chapters in more than 100 countries, they promote the concept of transparency. Transparency is a shield against government corruption.

We have visited with the Lebanese Transparency Association in Beirut. Realizing the unacceptable levels corruption reached in Lebanon and the need to act against it, in 1999 a group of business people, academics, economists, lawyers and intellectuals joined forces, creating LTA to curb corruption through civil society.

LTA fights corruption to improve the quality of life and to encourage government officials to take measures towards transparency and accountability. This strategy is used throughout the world.



The association does not investigate or expose individual cases of corruption, instead, LTA advocates for reform by focusing on systemic improvement and by building coalitions with other anti-corruption stakeholders, including the government, the private sector, media institutions, the international community and civil society organizations.

In the government, transparency is the cornerstone of democratic discourse. It implies accountability, honesty and fairness. It gives decision makers the courage to make mistakes, admit and learn from them. Open government employs good communication practices, such as public record laws and the concept of “government in the sunshine.”

### **Association Application**

Transparency is a fundamental concept of good governance. It is frequently adopted as a principle to guide board and staff discussions and decisions.

Members of an association expect a sense of openness. They want to trust that the board is making good decisions on their behalf.

The opposite of transparency in an association is a secretive organization, unwilling to share reports with members and hiding key issues. The board that restricts access to information and meetings. If problems occur, directors refuse to acknowledge and remedy them, for instance, conflicts of interest or financial diversions.

Successful associations must hold transparency as a key value. The board wants to adopt a principle of transparency.

Beyond adoption, it must be implemented:

- Encourage open meetings, share the agenda in advance.
- Invite participation through surveys, focus groups and technology platforms. Continuously seek stakeholder input.
- Share appropriate reports, convene an annual meeting, and produce an annual report.
- Promote the strategic direction of the board and provide updates.
- Respond in a timely and appropriate manner to member queries.
- For purchasing, use an RFP process.
- Disclose perceived and real conflicts of interest, avoiding persons who hoodwink decision making.

Transparency is also a fundamental aspect of management and administration by the association staff.

- The executive director and department heads should be a model of transparency with the volunteer leadership.
- Keep the website and social media up to date and invite inquiries.
- Be sure financial reports are timely, accurate and comprehensive.
- Be accessible, open and responsive to board and member queries.

- Invite irregularities to be reported, similar to a whistleblower policy.
- Realize IRS Form 990 is a symbol of transparency; share it upon demand, encourage access through on-line sources, and circulate to the governing body.

Associations can be a model of transparency, in turn, urging the same with public officials. A secret society will doom an association.

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Note: Bob Harris, CAE, provides free governance tips and template at [www.nonprofitcenter.com](http://www.nonprofitcenter.com). Karim Shaaban, IOM, is Field Programs Director for the Levant Region at the Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE).

