

# The Chaordic Commons of Terra Civitas

## Frequently Asked Questions

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<b>What is Terra Civitas?</b> .....	2
<b>What is the Chaordic Commons, and how is it different from Terra Civitas?</b> .....	2
<b>What specifically does the organization do?</b> .....	2
<b>Who controls the Commons, and how is it governed?</b> .....	3
<b>Core principles of the Chaordic Commons (box)</b> .....	4
<b>Who are the Owning Members of the Commons?</b> .....	5
<b>What are the benefits of participation?</b> .....	5
<b>How do I get involved?</b> .....	6
<b>What does it cost to become an Owning Member?</b> .....	6
<b>Can I share this information with friends and colleagues?</b> .....	7
<b>What if I have further questions?</b> .....	7

## **The Chaordic Commons: Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What is Terra Civitas?**

Loosely translated, Terra Civitas means “citizens of the Earth”. It is the name we have given to a growing web of people around the world who are linked chaordically and committed to a common purpose:

*To develop, disseminate, and implement new concepts of organization that result in more equitable sharing of power and wealth, improved health, and greater compatibility with the human spirit and biosphere.*

Terra Civitas came into being in the spring of this year with creation of the Chaordic Commons, a 501c3 nonprofit organization that supersedes the Chaordic Alliance. Terra Civitas is not incorporated as a separate entity.

### **What is the Chaordic Commons – and how is it different from Terra Civitas?**

We envision Terra Civitas as an expanding network of self-organizing, self-governing Commons that are both independent and interrelated.

The Chaordic Commons is the first of these and thus attracts people and organizations who want to participate in and grow that network. In this sense, the Chaordic Commons is a catalyst or a seed crystal for Terra Civitas, a much vaster and more complex global community that will evolve over many years.

At the same time, the Commons itself is a chaordic membership organization that supports leaders, change agents, citizens and social entrepreneurs in creating purpose-centered, principle-based systems for enterprise, learning, social action and service. (Those who link to the Commons, as individuals or institutions, are called Owing Members<sup>1</sup>.)

Our aim is to catalyze the emergence of a global community actively working in a wide range of fields to transform both the inner and outer landscapes of our organizations and institutions, at every level from the local to the global.

### **What specifically does the organization do?**

The Chaordic Commons evolved from the Chaordic Alliance. Presently a small core staff continues the activities to which the Alliance was dedicated – providing consulting services to organizations, communities and groups interested in chaordic approaches, and offering learning programs to those who seek a deeper understanding of the chaordic design process or core chaordic concepts (see [www.chaordic.org](http://www.chaordic.org) for more information on these programs).

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<sup>1</sup> In the Commons, ownership refers to nearly irrevocable rights of participation in the organization, including the right of access to common properties, not to a financial stake in the organization or its assets.

## **The Chaordic Commons: Frequently Asked Questions**

Over time, the role of core staff will shift. The Commons will increasingly fulfill its function as an enabling entity, serving primarily to support Owing Members in working on the issues and opportunities that matter most deeply to them while being linked in larger common cause and committed to a shared set of principles (see box on page 3).

We envision the organization quickly becoming ...

- An entrepreneurial web of dynamic innovation supporting transformational initiatives in health, education, corporate structure, environmental restoration, community development, philanthropy and many other fields.
- An evolving global commons in which business, government, NGOs, the arts and sciences, education and religion, youth and elders, men and women come together in partnership to create life-affirming organizations, institutions and communities.
- A safe harbor for dialogue and deliberation, for resolving differences and discovering shared purpose, for the collaborative development of solutions to some of our most pressing organizational and institutional challenges.
- A context for learning and discovery – a source of great ideas about organizational innovation – a place to learn about, teach and apply leading-edge concepts and methods for leadership, organizational design and community development.

Owing Members themselves will continually evolve more effective ways to serve the community and its larger constituencies, taking over many of the functions initially performed by core staff. A complex network of cooperative and competitive activities should evolve within the Commons, nourished by rich flows of intellectual, social and financial capital.

Chaordic concepts, now serving as the principal attractor for the Commons, will become one stream in a powerful confluence of the many diverse streams of knowledge and practice required for fully transforming organizations and institutions.

Of course, we don't know exactly what shape Terra Civitas or the Chaordic Commons will take as they evolve. If we did, they wouldn't be chaordic!

### **Who controls the Commons, and how is it governed?**

The Chaordic Commons belongs to its Owing Members. Participants can organize themselves at any scale up to the global while keeping power, authority and decision making at the smallest or most local level that includes all relevant and affected parties. Consequently, there is no single center of power in the Commons. As it evolves, they will be everywhere.

## Core Principles of the Chaordic Commons

Owning Members subscribe to five basic principles of practice and five fundamental principles of organization. In conducting activities of the Commons, each and every part of the Commons will:

### *Principles of Practice*

1. Work to ensure that all people, by right of birth, have adequate necessities of life, including clean air, water, food and shelter; an equitable share of wealth and resources; and opportunity to develop their full physical, mental and spiritual potential.
2. Work to ensure that human capacities, technologies and organizations sustain and support, not systemically alter, degrade or destroy, the Earth, its diversity of life or life support systems.
3. Work to ensure interdependent health and diversity of individuals, communities, institutions, cultures and other life forms.
4. Resolve conflict creatively and cooperatively without physical, economic, psychological, social, or ecological violence.
5. Freely and fully exchange information relevant to the purpose and principles unless doing so violates confidentiality or materially diminishes competitive position.

### *Principles of Organization*

1. Be open to membership by any Individual or Institution subscribing to the purpose and principles in conducting activities of Terra Civitas and the Chaordic Commons.
2. Have the right to self-organize at any time, on any scale, in any form, for any activity consistent with the purpose and principles.
3. Conduct deliberations and make decisions by bodies and methods that reasonably represent all relevant and affected parties and are dominated by none.
4. Vest authority, perform functions, and use resources in the smallest or most local part that includes all relevant and affected parties.
5. Induce not compel behavior, to the maximum degree possible.

## **The Chaordic Commons: Frequently Asked Questions**

These are not just an ideals – they are fundamental features of the Commons that are protected in its Constitution. Ideally the organization will grow more through the self-determined activities of its Owing Members than through strategic directions established by a central staff or board. Owing Members will govern themselves and the parts of the network in which they participate, and every aspect of the organization can be changed as the whole evolves.

A Council of Trustees, elected by participants, is responsible only for those few deliberations and decisions that concern the whole of the Commons. There is no self-perpetuating board that governs the organization or controls the activity of Owing Members.

What binds the community together is participants' unshakable focus on common purpose and their commitment to shared core principles.

### **Who are the Owing Members of the Commons?**

The growing network of people linked to the Commons includes individuals attracted to new ways of thinking, those leading transformative organizational or institutional change, and those committed to creating powerful new tools for innovation, learning and action.

Among them are entrepreneurs and visionary leaders in a wide variety of organizations; consultants, educators and communications professionals; financiers, philanthropists, and influential resource gatekeepers; and researchers and scholars in diverse fields. People in the public, private and nonprofit sectors are participating – and they come from around the world.

We encourage and value diversity in profession, philosophy, perspective, and approach. This diversity can be glimpsed in the individuals who comprise the current Council of Trustees (see [www.chaordic.org/who\\_bord.html](http://www.chaordic.org/who_bord.html)).

### **What are the benefits of participation?**

Many people are participating in the Commons because they want to broaden their circle of community, use their gifts in the service of a higher purpose, and support the vision represented by Terra Civitas. They create their own “benefits” through the activities they initiate, the relationships they develop, and the work in which they participate.

More specifically, participation in the Commons will provide:

- A newsletter and other learning tools and services.
- Online communications, conferencing and collaborative learning opportunities.

## The Chaordic Commons: Frequently Asked Questions

- Participation in and access to a network of creative leaders, consultants, scholars and social entrepreneurs.
- Opportunities to participate in working groups on specific issues, or to engage with others on change initiatives in different fields.
- Preferential access to core staff experienced in the chaordic design process and the application of chaordic concepts.
- Ways to offer services to others in or through the Commons.

The Commons is just forming, so much of this is still taking shape. Initial Owing Members will help us set priorities, provide specific services and implement different activities.

### How do I get involved?

The Commons is a chaordic membership organization. Those who link to it are called Owing Members.

*Individuals* and *Institutions* can apply for direct membership. They agree to subscribe to the purpose and principles of the Commons when conducting the Commons' activities, but are not bound by them when operating outside the Commons (for example, a company need not become chaordic in order to join as an institutional member).

*Communities*, *Alliances* and *Leagues* are centers of activity within the Commons that *fully* subscribe to the purpose and principles and observe them in *all* their activities.

When individuals or institutions join the Commons, they enter through one of six broad doorways called Origins. These Origins allow selection of a balanced Council of Trustees but do not constrain members' participation in any way. The Origins are:

- Commercial / Economic
- Governmental / Political
- Individual / Citizen Group
- Nonprofit / Nongovernmental
- Philanthropic / Investment
- Scientific / Academic

Applications to become an Owing Member are available on the web at [www.chaordic.org](http://www.chaordic.org). An Owing Member packet is available from the Commons' office.

### What does it cost to become an Owing Member?

Fees for Owing Membership are voluntary, to ensure that no one committed to participating in the Commons is unable to do so for financial reasons. Most Owing

## **The Chaordic Commons: Frequently Asked Questions**

Members have made a meaningful contribution upon joining, based both on their ability and on their desire to support the Commons and its purpose.

The Commons will depend on a combination of program revenues, Owning Member fees and contributions from individuals and organizations to meet its annual budget.

Because the Chaordic Commons is a 501c3 nonprofit corporation, fees and contributions are tax-deductible. You can write a check payable to the Chaordic Commons or call us with credit card information and have us charge your fees.

### **Can I share this information with friends and colleagues?**

Yes! Please let others know about Terra Civitas and the Chaordic Commons. You are welcome to copy and distribute this material to any one interested in helping transform and strengthen our organizations and institutions, guided by our most deeply held democratic, ethical, and spiritual values. Our success will depend on the participation and support of a wide range of visionary, caring and committed individuals and organizations from every country, field and sector!

### **What if I have further questions?**

If you have any questions, visit our website or contact us directly at:

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