



AMSA Top 10 Tips for becoming a Great Shed

Over the past two years we have seen a noticeable slowdown in the development of new Sheds. As Men's Sheds have evolved so have some of the internal issues that can greatly disrupt day to day operations within the Shed, and, in some cases, the problems have escalated to a stage forcing good members to leave the Shed and even forcing closure.

Most of these issues can be resolved through good management and engagement with all members –this is fundamental in becoming a great Men's Shed.

It's not how big the Men's Shed is or the quality of equipment that makes one better than the other; it's the men within the Men's Shed that make it great.

AMSA can provide support and advice to Sheds who are going through turbulent times, and through this experience we have composed *AMSA's Top Ten Tips* on how to become a great Shed and how to avoid such issues from ever arising.

Number 1. Men before the Shed: one of the most crucial aspects of the Men's Shed. After all, a Men's Shed with no men is just a Shed. The Shed Management Committee should always bear this in mind when making decisions relating to its ongoing management – first and foremost is what is in the best interest of all Members.

Number 2. Democracy: as an incorporated body your Men's Shed should have a Constitution that allows for the democratic election of Officer Bearers.

The AMSA has available a manual outlining comprehensive position descriptions for all Management Committee members.

Incorporated requirements such as the Annual General Meetings and Elections should be adhered to – always remember that it is a Men's Shed that belongs to all members; not 'Peter or John's Shed'. It is not the loudest voice in the Shed but the majority voice of the Shed.

Voting methods at AGM's can vary but best practice is via a ballot rather than a show of hands.

Number 3. Inclusive not exclusive: 'All Shed's for All Men' -be accepting and welcoming to new members. Be aware of becoming an exclusive group.

From time to time we hear of Men's Sheds that have had a closed door approach and sometimes this can be dominated by individual personalities and severely detrimental to the ongoing viability of the Shed. This also includes the cost of membership: this should be maintained at the lowest possible rate (levels that will adequately cover insurance and utilities).

Setting an affordable membership fee fosters participation for all Men. The average membership fee at the Shed is \$25 per year but there are some that exceed \$200 p.a. becoming exclusive clubs rather than Men's Sheds.

Number 4. Engaging with your community: Men's Sheds have become vital community hubs and a great Men's Shed should embrace this and effectively engage with other community groups. A Men's Shed has so much to offer the broader community whether it be building a project for the local school or assisting in fundraising events. This is also a great way to source new members as well as support from local businesses.

Number 5. Succession Planning: ensure there is more than one person running the Shed and share the responsibility. Have a good Succession Plan in place and a simple way of doing this is rather than elect a 'Chairman or President' at the AGM elect a 'Chairman Elect' who will take office within one to two years time. Try not to become too reliant on one person as this person may move on leaving the Shed to flounder. It also opens the door for the one thing that can totally ruin a Men's Shed -the 'Dictator'.

Number 6. Viability verses commercialism: It is the aim of all Men's Sheds to become financially sustainable but never confuse this with commercial. Sheds have always been resourceful in fundraising initiatives, but Men's Sheds are not to compete with commercial operations that provide jobs within the local economy. Also be well informed and extremely careful of third parties offering money for services such as 'Work for the Dole' programmes and 'youth mentoring'. There is comprehensive information about this on the AMSA website but each case is different. The Best advice is to contact AMSA directly for support as engaging in these programs may redefine your Shed as a commercial venture that can affect your insurances, taxation obligations and liabilities. It also has the potential to be a negative for your members. Remember, if it sounds too good to be true it probably is.

Number 7. Greed and need: The best Sheds are ones in which the members have a real sense of ownership because they, the men, made it happen. Great Sheds have worked hard as a group to source funding to develop their Shed and they haven't relied solely on grants from government. They have attracted funds from local businesses and participated in fundraising activities such as raffles and BBQ's. This helps to give a Shed its heart and soul. Aim for what your Shed needs and don't be greedy. There is always a limit on funds available even in government funding rounds so don't expect to have it all at once.

Number 8. Marketing: make sure the world knows you exist. This can be done locally through basic initiatives such as posters in public places and local stores, talking with local media or through your own website. All AMSA members are listed on our Shed Locator. This, and the 1300 number, is the main way for the public, government and corporate sector to access the location of your Shed. You may not realise it but most calls you receive from new members or for a donation originated from here. AMSA processes thousands of inquiries a year from those wishing to find their local Men's Shed.

Number 9. Communicate: Regularly communicate with your members and supporters and provide them with regular updates via Shed newsletters or emails on the activities of the Shed. The weekly Toolbox Meeting for all members is highly recommended by the AMSA

Number 10. When in Doubt Call AMSA: there are some self- proclaimed Men's Shed experts many of whom are ill informed or acting with self interest.

We all too often have to deal with the results and provide support to Sheds who have been misinformed or misled. Remember it is very difficult for 'armchair experts' to be held accountable for misleading information.

The AMSA will be initiating Australia's first Accredited Training Programme for Men's Shed. AMSA will support our volunteers and assist you with the correct advice and support. All of AMSA's 5 staff members have an extensive background and knowledge of the Men's Sheds movement and are here to assist and support you through the journey to becoming a Great Shed.