



What's in a Name?

By Carol L. Topp, CPA

*O Romeo, Romeo! wherefore art thou Romeo?
Deny thy father and refuse thy name;*

*What's in a name? That which we call a rose
By any other name would smell as sweet;*

-Romeo and Juliet by William Shakespeare

Juliet hoped that Romeo's name didn't define who he was, but for your homeschool organization, the choice of name is very important!

Dual Names

Your organization will probably have at least two names: a legal name and a 'Doing Business as' name. For legal purposes, a name should be very distinct, so your group will not be confused with another group or a school. My co-op's legal name is "Mason Ohio Educational Home School Organization". Quite a mouthful, huh? We're called "Mason Home School Co-op" on our checking account and "Mason Co-op" to members. Why the difference? In several states, use of the word Co-op in your name is reserved for corporations who file under the Cooperative Corporation Law. The name Co-op can be used by any organization if you follow your state law's for Co-ops. These usually apply to electric co-ops or rural co-ops and involve things like sharing profits, membership voting, etc We don't want to follow those guidelines, nor are we a corporation, so we cannot use the word Co-op. So we avoided the word Co-op in our legal name. In our "DBA" name we use it.

Legal Name

Why do you need a "legal name"? At some point your group may be large enough that you need a legal name. To open a bank account you may need a legal name. If you want to be recognized as a non-profit organization by your state (and avoid paying taxes on all that "profit" you make!) you will need a legal name. Most banks and all state governments require your organization to get an EIN (Employer Identification Number) from the IRS. Now, don't panic here. This is not Big Brother attempting to control your group or limit home school freedoms. An EIN is sort of like a social security number for businesses. It's actually misnamed. You don't need to be an Employer to obtain an EIN. They are offered for free by the IRS. (Go to www.irs.gov/taxtopics/tc755.html for more information on EINs)

Not a school

Avoid any word that would be confused with a school. I see the word Academy used a lot for homeschool co-ops. That name might imply you are a full service school. Schools have a lot of regulations that home school co-ops don't need to follow. Avoid anything that could confuse your organization with a full service school.

Not already taken

You need to make sure your name is not already used. Typically using your city and state name in your legal title helps to avoid duplication. If you decide to become an IRS recognized tax exempt organization, you'll need to do a name search to be sure your name is not already used. Visit your state's Secretary of State's website. Most offer name searches for free. Also visit the IRS's tax exempt web site (www.irs.gov/eo) and do a name search there.

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