

SOUTHERN ARIZONA OPEN SPACES ALLIANCE

Preliminary Organization Concept for Founding Group Discussion

Purpose and Opportunity

The Southern Arizona Open Spaces Alliance would be a community-led organization dedicated to protecting native open spaces, wildlife habitat, water resources, rural character, and environmentally significant lands from inappropriate industrial development. It would grow out of the Save Robles Junction effort, where residents, ranchers, conservationists, property owners, and community leaders have organized around the proposed conversion of thousands of acres of native desert near Robles Junction and Three Points into an industrial-scale solar facility.

The immediate goal is not to build a large institution before one is needed. It is to establish a credible regional alliance that can educate the public, organize affected communities, advocate before government bodies, and respond quickly when important open spaces are threatened.

Preliminary Organizational Recommendation

Begin immediately as an informal community alliance. This structure is fast, flexible, and sufficient for meetings, public education, petitions, volunteer organizing, public comments, signs, email and text outreach, and advocacy before agencies and elected bodies.

The group should deliberately preserve the option to form an Arizona nonprofit corporation and pursue 501(c)(4) status later, but only after a committed founding group, meaningful fundraising capacity, and a sustained need for multiple campaigns, contracts, staffing, or electoral advocacy have emerged. A future 501(c)(3) affiliate may be useful for research, public education, conservation projects, grants, and tax-deductible giving, but it should not be the primary structure if advocacy and mobilization remain the core mission.

Structure	What It Allows	Best Use / Limitation
Informal community alliance	Immediate organizing, education, petitions, public comments, signs, outreach, volunteer activity, and government advocacy.	Best fit now; limited for major fundraising, contracts, staffing, liability protection, and sustained election activity.
501(c)(3) charitable organization	Research, public education, conservation work, forums, grants, tax-deductible donations, and limited lobbying.	Potential future affiliate; cannot support or oppose candidates and must remain within lobbying limits.
501(c)(4) social-welfare organization	Broad lobbying, regulatory advocacy, ballot-measure work, public-pressure campaigns, political accountability, and limited candidate-related activity.	Likely long-term fit if the Alliance becomes a funded, sustained regional advocacy organization; donations are generally not tax-deductible.

Mission and Geographic Scope

Proposed mission: To protect Southern Arizona's native open spaces, wildlife habitat, water resources, rural communities, and natural heritage by educating the public, organizing affected communities, and advocating for responsible land-use decisions.

The Alliance would not oppose every development or energy project. It would evaluate proposals based on location, scale, environmental and water impacts, wildlife corridors, effects on surrounding communities, and compatibility with responsible regional planning.

The initial geographic focus should be Pima County and Southern Arizona, beginning with Robles Junction, Three Points, Altar Valley, and other rural or environmentally sensitive areas facing major land-use pressure. The mission should be broad enough to address future projects across the region while remaining locally grounded.

Leadership and Working Roles

The Alliance should begin with a small working board and leadership team rather than immediately hiring a large staff. Several roles may initially be filled by board members, volunteers, stipend-supported leaders, contractors, or one person serving in more than one capacity.

- **Board of Directors** - Provides governance, approves major decisions, protects the mission, and supports fundraising and community relationships.
- **Executive Director / Lead Organizer** - Coordinates strategy, partnerships, administration, fundraising, communications, research, events, and execution of the board's priorities.
- **Government Affairs and Regulatory** - Tracks zoning cases, State Land Department activity, public notices, hearings, deadlines, votes, and agency processes; coordinates lobbying and public-comment strategy.
- **Political Affairs** - Handles ballot-measure strategy, voter education, voting records, political accountability, coalition relationships, and election-related compliance when needed.

- **Research and Documentation** - Reviews applications, maps, studies, staff reports, land ownership, water use, wildlife impacts, and public records; produces briefs, timelines, fact sheets, and presentations.
- **Communications, Social Media, and Marketing** - Manages websites, email, social media, digital ads, press, branding, graphics, signs, mail, video, and rapid-response messaging.
- **Events and Community Engagement** - Plans town halls, fundraisers, volunteer events, public forums, logistics, registration, follow-up, and local volunteer recruitment.
- **Development and Membership** - Builds recurring membership, individual giving, major-donor relationships, business sponsorships, fundraising events, and eligible grant opportunities.
- **Treasurer and Compliance** - Oversees budgets, financial controls, reporting, filings, disclosures, and separation among any future affiliated entities or committees.
- **Legal and Land-Use Advisors / Regional Representatives** - Provide specialized guidance, identify emerging issues, maintain local relationships, organize residents, and keep the Alliance connected to affected communities.

Fundraising and Use of Funds - Initial Outline

At the alliance stage, fundraising should remain simple, campaign-driven, and proportionate to actual needs. Potential support may come from individual contributions, recurring memberships, major donors, ranchers, landowners, outdoor recreation supporters, locally owned businesses, event sponsors, conservation and wildlife partners, and campaign-specific fundraising.

Early funds should be used for direct organizing needs: websites and supporter databases, email and texting, signs and printed materials, direct mail, digital advertising, research, public-records requests, meetings, events, professional advice, and other campaign expenses approved by the founding group.

Immediate Next Steps

1. **Establish the founding group.** Doug should convene approximately five to nine prospective members representing affected residents, ranching, conservation, business, communications, fundraising, legal, political, and government experience. The group should approve a working name, mission, geographic scope, leadership roles, and a basic decision-making process.
2. **Use Save Robles Junction as the first organizing test.** Continue the current campaign, grow the supporter database, hold community meetings, recruit volunteers, collect initial contributions, and identify which leaders can own the working roles. Adopt a simple six-month organizing and fundraising target before creating significant overhead.

Optional continuation: A separate Formation, Fundraising, and Operating Addendum outlines the path to formally launch the organization if the founding group develops sufficient energy, leadership, and fundraising capacity to pursue a \$50,000-\$75,000 first-year pilot.