

How to... set up a community group

Why set up a community group?

There are many reasons why people might want to set up a voluntary or community group:

There is a need: Local people who have identified a need for a particular activity or service in their area, or it could be that there is a real gap in the services or activities in your area. Maybe a service is already being provided but is not accessible enough, or is not being delivered in an appropriate way.

To get something done: There may be an identified need, but crucially it needs the time and commitment from people, like yourselves, who are willing to get on and do something about it! This often involves stimulating debate to gain support and attract attention.

To work with other people: Running a group is a team effort. It isn't just about the amount of work to do, but also about shared responsibility. Starting a group means working together with people who share similar concerns and are aiming to solve a particular problem or meet a certain need.

Help a community access funds: to improve the local area with projects for environmental, sports, arts, health or leisure activities.

This guide will introduce community and voluntary groups and explain in brief what you need to do to set one up.



Considerations when setting up a community group

Setting up a new group involves a variety of tasks and there a number of things you will need to consider. The more aware you are of what you need to do the easier the task will be. Forethought and good planning at this stage can save a lot of wasted effort or work later. It is likely there will be a lot of helpful people and agencies with the expertise you need. The following key questions below are provided as an essential checklist.

Key questions:

- What do we want to do?
- Where do we want to do it?
- What do we want to do with it?
- Do we have the time, energy and commitment to do the work ourselves?
- Do we have a plan for action?
- Do we need policies and procedures?
- Do we have a constitution?
- Do we need a committee?
- When will we hold general meetings?
- Do we need a bank account?
- Does our work involve young people or vulnerable adults?
- How will we generate funds?
- Do we need to allocate training provision?
- Have we set out public relations activities?
- Have we taken into account legal responsibilities towards the people we will work with or provide a service to?

What makes a successful group?

- Meeting a need
- Being clear and realistic about what you want to do and can achieve
- Team effort - working with new or existing communities members
- Securing resources to help you achieve your aims (e.g. people and funding)
- Understanding legal and other responsibilities

Avoid overlapping with other groups

Are there organisations that already offer what you intend to provide?

You could research this on the internet, at your local library or local authority. If they exist, join the group.

Duplicating can be expensive, a waste of resources, creates ill-feeling with those you compete with and deters funders. Joining an existing organisation and working with them saves a lot of hard work setting yourselves up and getting everything off the ground.

Could you work in partnership with any other groups or organisations?

If there are groups already doing something similar you might work together to develop something new or set up a group in your area if they do not already reach there. You might share resources, premises and expertise.

Speak to the experts

In the region local councils for voluntary service (or local development trusts as they are also sometimes called) and your local authority's community development team will be able to offer you advice and guidance on setting up your group.

Good relations with other organisations have a big impact on the success of community groups.

Getting started

It is important to think about the following questions before getting started:

- What do you want to achieve?
- What kinds of activities will you want to provide to achieve this?
- How do you know there is a need for what you want to do? Who needs it? How many people need it?
- Will your group meet these needs in full/ in part?
- What will be the benefits from running your activities?



For each of your proposed activities, consider the following:

- Who will run the activity? Do you have volunteers or will you need paid staff? Is training required?
- What skills or experience do you have within your group to run the activity?
- Will you need premises? For example, hall hire or office space?
- How will you advertise your services and publicise your group?
- How much will it cost?
- Where will funds be sought and who will do the fundraising?

You need to be as specific and realistic as possible about costs. Do you have access to equipment, or outside expertise, which could help you?

Getting organised: committees and constitutions

Initially there are usually three to four people who set up a group before evolving into a management committee of between three to eleven people.

Responsibility for the group should be shared between a number of people who will make decisions, co-ordinate activities, make sure funding is in place and so on. You will need to set up a management committee responsible for ensuring that your group:

- Sets aims and objectives and plans ahead
- Works towards its aims and objectives, and acts in the best interests of the people your group is set up to support (your beneficiaries)
- Has enough resources to carry out all of your work, and that these resources are well-managed and used to meet your aims and objectives
- Holds regular committee meetings



The constitution

Your group will need a Governing Document so that everyone knows:

- What your organisation is called and what it aims to do
- How your organisation will be run
- Who is responsible for running your organisation

You also need this document to apply for money to run your group. People will only give money to you if they are confident it will all be accounted for and spent properly. The normal type of governing document for a small group is a constitution.

Once your group has agreed and signed your constitution, it is a legal document. The committee, not the members, will be personally responsible for making sure the rules are followed.

Funding

As a community based organisation you may be eligible to apply for a grant or a funding opportunity.

Funding sources include:

- Local government
- Central government
- Big Lottery fund programmes
- Funding Central
- Funding via trusts or intermediaries e.g. Community Development Foundation (CDF), Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF), Development Trust Association (DTA)

See more at www.direct.gov.uk and www.governmentfunding.org.uk

Further information

Companies House, Tel: 0870 3333636, web: www.companies-house.gov.uk

www.brighterfuturestogether.co.uk/view_factsheet.php?fs=28&cat=3

www.communitygroup.co.uk/

www.resourcecentre.org.uk/information/setting_up/