

Setting up a new group

If you are interested in setting up a new voluntary or community organisation there can be a mind-boggling number of things to consider. There are decisions to be made, information to be gathered, and jobs to do. If, however, you tackle this process with a good plan of action and plenty of help and support, then it isn't as daunting as it might seem at first. Some of the most important considerations can be split up into two basic areas, the main points of which are covered below. However, these are only guidelines for good practice as there are no laws for voluntary and community organisations (unless they are also registered charities).

For more information please refer to Factsheet 2: Constitutions, Factsheet 3: Management Committees and Factsheet 4: Planning and Holding Meetings.

1: Things that you need to ask, find out, or decide

What do you want to do?

You need to have a specific idea about exactly what the group you are setting up is going to do.

- Will it offer a service to a community or will it be of benefit solely to its members?
- What are the aims of this group?
- What do you want to achieve?
- Where do you want to do it?
- What area are you going to cover? Be realistic about this - if you only have the resources to cover a small area don't try and overstretch yourself. Don't forget you can always start small and expand your target area later on.

Who do you want to do it with?

If you are providing a service then you may want to identify a specific group of people with whom you are going to work, for example people affected by a specific issue or living in a defined area. Are you for going to work with the residents of a particular area or with a minority Ethnic community? Don't forget the implications of the group that you're working with on your resources. If the community has special needs or is particularly vulnerable then you will need to take this into account in your service and funding plans.

Are you overlapping with other groups?

Once you have made these decisions, you need to do a bit of research and find out if there is already a group doing the same kind of things you want to do in the same area. Duplicating what other groups are doing won't help you when it comes to trying to get support, funding or volunteers so it is a good idea to ensure that what you want to do is new and/or unique in some way before you start.

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

If there are groups already doing something similar perhaps you could make your idea an addition to their already successful organisation, or perhaps you could work together to develop something new. If you are in a similar geographical area then you could perhaps share premises and work together for the benefit of both groups.

2: Things that you need to do

Getting support

Start by thinking about who might be interested in getting involved in the group. Then you can start advertising your intentions to start up a group by using posters, leaflets etc. in areas where this target group might go, for example a local community centre, doctor's surgery or school.

Developing an action plan

In order to share out jobs and lessen the burden of information gathering it is important for your group to spend some time identifying tasks and goals and working out priorities. From this you can identify what needs to be done and share out the important jobs. Doing this will ensure that everyone gets a job, everyone knows what they're working towards and no one person gets over loaded with work. It will also make funding applications easier if you have a clear plan of what, when and where you want to do things.

Adopting a constitution

If you are going to set up a new group then you will need to write and agree a set of rules outlining exactly what you aim to do and how you intend to do it. This “*governing document*” will outline how you all agree to work together, covering areas like management committees, finances and general meetings. One of your first tasks, therefore, will be to write a governing document or constitution. You should ensure that it reflects what you aim to do and how you want to work towards it, as well as giving you flexibility for the future and ensuring that funders will be satisfied with your rules and precautions.

Getting a committee

There is usually a group of people from within the membership of your organisation who will be responsible for the day to day running of the organisation. The constitution might call them the Management Committee, the Executive Committee or the Steering Group. Whatever it is called, they are the people (elected by and from within the membership of your group) who manage it.

Holding your first General Meeting

General Meetings, or a meeting of all of the members of your new group, are usually the overall decision making body for organisations. The General Meeting will be the ultimate body, to which the Management Committee are accountable, and the place where elections are held. At the first of these meetings (which should afterwards be held annually) you need to vote to agree your constitution and to elect a new Management Committee.

Opening a bank account

Once you have set up your group you will need to open a bank account to keep any money that the group may raise. The account should be opened in the name of the group (not in the names of any of the members or their businesses, etc.) and at least two people’s signatures should be necessary in order to spend any money from the account. This means having two signatories though it’s usually a good idea to have at least three or four people who can sign cheques so that there is always someone available if one or more of the signatories is unavailable.

3: Further Help

Other groups

It is unlikely that any of the difficulties or problems that you might face in setting up a new group will be new problems. They are likely to have been experienced by other groups before you. Working in partnership, sharing information and networking with other groups can be of benefit to you and to them, giving you both the extra bit of support, advice and information that you need. As well as being very attractive to funders.

Advice Agencies

www.askncvo.org.uk is the website of the National Centre for Voluntary Organisations and has lots of useful information and advice for new and established groups.