



HOW TO SETUP A COMMUNITY GROUP



There are many reasons for setting up a community group - an individual or group of people may want to address a particular problem, meet a certain need or feel there is a lack of a particular facility or service in their community.

Over the following pages you'll be guided through what you need to have in place in order to set up a voluntary or community group, and the options that are available to you.

Setting up a new organisation can be enjoyable, and can give you a lot of satisfaction. However, it can take a lot of energy, enthusiasm and hard work, and sometimes a good deal of patience, to make a success of a new organisation.

FIRST STEPS

The best way to start is to bring together a small number of people who share your interest or concerns and talk with them about what you could do. At this stage, you want people to contribute their ideas and experiences so as a group, you can decide what you want to focus your attention on and how to find and involve other people. Some suggestions for involving people in yours plans include:

- Ask people you know: friends, neighbours, community members, etc.
- Advertise in community centres, on community noticeboards, in libraries, through parish councils and community workers.
- Advertise in local media: newspapers, radio, etc.
- Use social media to spread the word.

RESEARCH OTHER GROUPS

There are many groups working in and around the Bradford District so you need to check that you are not duplicating their work. If you have a very similar project to someone else, perhaps think about working together to share resources and experience, or perhaps simply joining their group instead of setting up a new one. DIVA Bradford brings together information on voluntary and community sector groups from across Bradford District in a single searchable directory and can be found on this link: www.divabradford.org.uk

YOUR FIRST MEETING

Once you've gathered interested people and have checked that you are not duplicating the work of others, it's time to have your first meeting. This could be a formal launch or an informal chat over a cup of tea. Whichever approach you take, make sure you record who was there, and the main points of the meeting so you have a record to draw upon. Even take photos if you can (and have permission from the attendees).

Only a few people may turn up to your initial meeting but it is important to get their input at all stages of the process. You can also use this meeting to see if people would be willing to sit on your management committee.

SETTING AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

At this stage, people may have very different ideas, so you need to be open and listen to other people's viewpoints. Discuss their ideas and agree on what it is you want to focus on. A good place to start is to think about what issue or problem you want to tackle.

Once you have set your aims and objectives you will be able to write a constitution for the group. More information on writing a constitution can be found further along in the booklet.

COMMITTEE AND MANAGEMENT ROLES

A management committee usually consists of a Chairperson, Treasurer and Secretary, plus a few general committee members. The role of the committee is to make the overall decisions about the group and its work, and to act as the accountable people for the group. Information on the different roles and responsibilities is outlined below:

CHAIRPERSON

Planning Meetings

- Set the agenda along with the Secretary.
- Ensure that the agenda, minutes of previous meeting and other papers are sent out prior to the meeting.
- Make sure that all the committee members know the dates, times and venues of meetings, as far in advance as possible.

Running Meetings

- Make sure that the meeting starts and finishes on time, is quorate, and is orderly.
- Make sure that everyone gets an opportunity to contribute their views.
- Conduct votes if necessary and use a casting (second) vote if necessary.
- Rule on any disputes about the constitution.
- Be alert to potential conflicts of interest.

Representing the Organisation

- Be a spokesperson and representative for the group at meetings.
- #### Governing the Organisation
- Ensuring that decisions and action plans are implemented by the committee.

SECRETARY

General Administration

- Keep a copy of the constitution, meeting minutes and other important documents.
- Keep records of the organisation's membership.

Meetings

- Book the meeting room and arrange refreshments (or set up an online meeting if you are not meeting in person).
- Prepare the agenda with the Chairperson.
- Circulate the agenda and any other papers.
- Check that meetings are quorate.
- Ensure the Chairperson signs the minutes when they have been approved by the committee.
- Take notes, write and circulate minutes.
- Monitor when committee members' term of office ends.

TREASURER

Financial Records

- Keep accounts.
- Produce end of year accounts and arrange for these to be examined or audited, where required.
- Make sure that bills are paid promptly and that all income is banked regularly.
- Liaise with the bank and make sure that bank statements are kept securely.
- Check that bank statements reconcile with the cash book.

Helping committee members understand the finances

- Provide financial information to the whole committee.
- Explain the financial situation to the committee in a language that they can understand.
- Enable the committee to agree an annual budget.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Expectations

- To regularly attend committee meetings.
- To read meeting minutes and other papers in preparation for meetings.
- To send apologies when unable to attend meetings.
- To participate in training and development activities.
- To declare any conflicts of interest at meetings.

Conduct

- Be familiar with and agree to the aims and objectives of the organisation.
- Work with the committee as a group to achieve the organisation's aims.
- Make decisions which are in the best interests of the organisation and the users.
- Keep the organisation's business confidential.
- Represent the organisation at functions and meetings.

Responsibilities

- To keep up to date about the organisation's work and the wider issues affecting it.
- To make sure that the organisation has enough money to meet its obligations.
- Develop policies.
- Making sure the organisation stays within the law and the constitution.
- Making sure the organisation is adequately insured.
- To lead the organisation effectively.

A committee may also invite other people to serve on the committee (known as co-opting). They may be members of the group but can also come from outside, and are generally co-opted because they have particular skills or knowledge, but do not always have voting rights (this will depend on what you put in your constitution).

CONSTITUTION

A constitution is simply the aims and rules that your group will use. It is a written understanding of what your group is going to do and how it is going to do it. It is important because:

- It keeps the group on track and helps everyone to know their roles.
- It will serve as a reference, and help to resolve problems in times of controversy.
- Outsiders, especially potential funders, will want to see that your group is democratic and accountable. This involves having a clear procedure by which decisions are made.

For these reasons it is important to write a constitution that reflects the way in which you want to do things. In order to ensure all committee members are in agreement with the constitution it is best to have a discussion in the group and decide what everyone wants to do.

The following information will help you draw up a constitution for what is termed an 'unincorporated association'. It is entirely up to your members how you organise your group and, therefore, what you put in your constitution.

Your constitution should reflect what your group wants to do, and so will be different from the constitutions of other groups. Even so most constitutions have a similar structure and will have similar headings. You will probably want to include sections on:

- Aims and objectives
- Membership
- Officers, committee, and committee members
- Meetings
- Finances

You can download a template for a constitution for an unincorporated association here: www.communityimpactbucks.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/CIB-Sample-Constitution.pdf

STRUCTURES FOR YOUR GROUP

There are lots of different structures you can use to set up your group, depending on whether the group will be a small neighbourhood group run by local people or a larger voluntary agency with staff. The three types of structure which you may want to consider are:

- Unincorporated association
- Charitable trust
- Charitable company

In this booklet we focus on setting up an unincorporated association.

UNINCORPORATED ASSOCIATIONS

An unincorporated association is a membership organisation. It can be whatever its members want it to be, and carry out whatever activity you choose. It is the easiest, quickest and cheapest way for a group to set itself up. Unless there is a membership fee, you are not even obliged to keep a membership list: anyone who is entitled by your rules to be a member can simply turn up and take part. This structure is suitable for groups such as play schemes, pensioners associations, arts groups and campaigning groups.

You do not have to seek approval of any kind before setting up or register with any regulatory body. However, if your group grows to have an annual income above £5,000 you are required to register with the Charity Commission. You are free to draw up your own constitution setting out the rules under which your group will be run.

Please note

If an unincorporated association closes with outstanding debts, its officers or trustees will be personally liable for the debts. Some insurance companies offer a policy which will enable officers to claim for any debts which they have to cover. However, insurers usually state that closure of the group must be outside of the control of the officers or trustees. There are usually other exclusion clauses too which may make it difficult to put in a successful claim.

Further information on charitable trusts and charitable companies can be found here:

<https://www.resourcecentre.org.uk/information/legal-structures-for-community-and-voluntary-groups/>

POLICIES

As your group develops and grows, in addition to your constitution, you'll need to have several other written policies in place. These include Health and Safety, Equal Opportunities, Vulnerable Adults and Child Protection. Community Action's Development Officers are able assist you in writing policies. Details on how to contact them can be found here: www.cabad.org.uk/development-officers. More information on writing policies can be found here:

www.resourcecentre.org.uk/information-category/making-your-group-work-well/policies-and-procedures

SETTING UP A BANK ACCOUNT

Most high street banks offer accounts for not-for-profit organisations, which will allow your group to start depositing funds and authorise signatories to access to them.

You should give some consideration to which provider to go with – there are many ethical accounts available from providers, and these may suit your group's constitution better than 'standard' group accounts. This link gives you some useful information on this subject:

www.resourcecentre.org.uk/information/bank-accounts-for-community-and-voluntary-organisations

GENERATING FUNDS

As a community-based organisation, you may be eligible to apply for funding or a grant. Sign up to Bfunded for regular updates on a wide range of funds that are available throughout the year:

www.cabad.org.uk/bfunded/?msclkid=cb3df187a9d311ecbe43394324f63a24

If you need access to equipment or outside expertise, consider approaching local organisations and explain that the group is at a very early stage in its development; they may offer a discount or even provide their services free of charge.

ARRANGING INSURANCE

Part of the process of setting up your group is ensuring that you have the correct insurance to protect committee members in the event of anything going wrong. More information on what is needed can be found here: www.markeluk.com/charity-insurance/community-group-insurance/what-insurance-does-a-community-group-need

FINDING A PLACE TO MEET

Community centres and halls are ideal bases for your group; many are at the heart of a community, accessible and low cost. Sports clubs often have function rooms which can be hired for little or no cost. Try to plan meetings well ahead of schedule to ensure as many people are available to attend as possible.

PROMOTING THE GROUP

Once aims and objectives have been set out and funding and insurance are in place, it's time to let the public know. The type of promotion to use depends on those who need to know about your group; if they are active online, consider using social networks, such as Twitter and Facebook, to spread the word. Also use good old fashioned word of mouth and flyers or adverts around the local community.





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