

Setting Up A Residents Or Community Group

Residents and community groups provide an opportunity to meet new people, share information, learn new skills, solve issues with others and stimulate community led action.

People start up groups because:

- They have identified a need for a particular activity or service in their area
- They want to get something done about an issue that affects a number of people
- They want to access funding to provide a local activity

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.

Considerations When Setting Up A Community Group

Setting up a new group involves a variety of tasks and there are 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. 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?**
- **Why do we want to do it?**
- **Who do we want to do 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 need a constitution?**
- **Do we need a committee?**
- **When will we hold meetings?**
- **Do we need a bank account?**
- **Does our work involve young people or vulnerable adults?**
- **How will we generate funds?**

- **Are we clear about how we will publicise what we do and communicate with others?**

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 community members**
- **Securing resources to help you achieve your aims (eg people and funding)**
- **Understanding legal and other responsibilities**

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

Are there groups who already offer what you intend to provide?

You could research this on the internet, at your local library or local authority. Joining an existing organisation and working with them can save a lot of hard work establishing your group.

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

Managing Your Group

- **Who will run your group? Do you have volunteers or will you need paid staff? Is training required?**
- **What skills or experience do you have within your group to do what you want to do?**
- **Will you need premises? For example room hire or office space?**
- **How will you advertise 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 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 doing what you do?**

Getting Organised

Initially there are usually three to four people who set up a group. 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 might want 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 interest of the people your group is set up to support**
- **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 opportunities for people to come together**

Bringing People Together

You will want to attract as many people as possible. Face-to-face conversations with people work best - either going door-to-door or making sure you're in the places where people gather e.g - outside local shops. You might want to have some leaflets to give out which very briefly explain what you are trying to do, and publicise where and when you are planning to meet. Talk to people but also make sure you listen to their concerns and what they hope to get out of meeting up with others. Put up posters in public places to publicise your first meeting.

You will need to find a place to meet in. Try to find somewhere that everyone can easily travel to and will feel comfortable. Is there a community space nearby that can provide a room? Is it accessible? Is it warm? It could be a local community centre, a cafe, a housing office, a room at the bottom of your block of flats. Think about what time of day is likely to suit most people, if unsure then perhaps have two initial drop-ins, eg - a daytime slot and an evening slot.

Once people have come together, start with a welcome, introductions and be clear about the purpose of the meeting.

You will have a clear idea of what you want to achieve but you will want to be flexible so that everyone who comes feels they can have their say about the issues that matter to them. If you are lucky enough to attract a lot of people, think about having some discussion in small groups so that everyone can contribute.

Make sure that at the end of your first get-together, there are clear actions agreed and everyone is clear about next steps.

Forming Your Group

Assuming there is interest in continuing as a group, think about how it is going to run. Some groups are formal and some informal, but all groups need a small group of people to take responsibility for organising meetings, encouraging others to join, ensuring agreed actions are followed up. Many groups have a chair, a secretary and a treasurer.

The Chair provides leadership, sets the agenda for meetings, manages the meetings and has responsibility for making sure that everyone can be involved in discussions and actions. A good chair needs to be friendly, firm and focused regarding the purpose of the meeting, but also flexible. A good chair helps develop leadership skills amongst other members of the group.

The Secretary supports the chair in making sure that meetings run smoothly, they may take minutes of meetings or at least note down all actions agreed, they may be responsible for booking venues and publicising future meetings.

The Treasurer manages any money the group has, and records income and expenditure. They will manage any banking functions. But, remember, if you don't have any funds to treasure, you don't need a treasurer!

Some groups choose to have a much more fluid structure however, where people share roles, and discussions are **facilitated**, rather than chaired. The role of the facilitators is not that different from being the chair. It involves:

- Encouraging full participation
- Promoting mutual understanding
- Fostering inclusive solutions

It partly depends upon whether you want to be a constituted group and hold money or not - as formal associations often require named people in specific roles.

Different Types of Groups

- Unincorporated Association
- Charitable Trust
- Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO)
- Charitable Company

For more information about these structures - legal and non-legal, see <https://www.resourcecentre.org.uk/information/legal-structures-for-community-and-voluntary-groups/>

Whichever form your group takes, you are likely to want a governing document or constitution. You will definitely need this if you want to apply for money, unless you can find another organisation to hold money on your behalf.

The Constitution

The normal type of governing document for a small group is a constitution so that everyone knows:

- What your organisation is called
- What you aim to do and how you aim to do it
- How your organisation will be run
- Who is responsible for running your organisation

Building Involvement - Pointers To Successful Meetings

- Clarify expectations and agree the purpose of the meeting
- Is the venue accessible to everyone? Does it have level access? Is it on a bus route? Is it well lit at night? Is it in an area where people feel comfortable visiting?
- Can you lay the room out in a friendly style, eg - chairs in a circle or cabaret style, rather than sitting around a board table or in rows?
- Has childcare been arranged? If it's a creche does it meet the needs of children of all ages attending?
- Is the food appropriate? Eg - have you checked out dietary needs and does it respect cultural traditions?
- Are the times suitable for all the participants? Think about both time of day and cultural issues around periods of celebration and religious observances etc.
- Is the language used in the publicity and in meetings understandable to all potential participants?
- Is the agenda appropriate for those who have less information than others, if not explain
- Build upon everyone's skills and knowledge - you may want to do a skills audit where people can list the skills they have, from IT skills to fundraising.