



Getting your Group Started

Why do you want to set up a community group?

Have you identified a need in your area as a result of a gap in services or activities? Are you one of a group of like-minded people who share a vision to improve an area? Or perhaps you have identified an area where some individuals are feeling isolated or need extra support. There are many reasons why people might want to set up a voluntary or community group. Whatever your reasons, one thing is certain: starting a new group needs time and commitment from people like you, people who are willing to get on and do something about the issues you have identified. And this often involves stimulating debate to gain support and attract attention.

Running a group is a team effort. It isn't just about the amount of work that needs to be done, but also about sharing 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.

Things to consider when setting up a community group

Setting up a new group involves a variety of tasks and so there are a number of things you will need to consider. The more aware you are of all you need to do, the easier the tasks will be.

Forethought and good planning at this stage can save a lot of wasted effort or work later. You can use the key questions below as an essential checklist:

- What do we want to do?
- Where 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 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?
- What is the legislation around this?
- How will we generate funds?
- Will we need training and, if so, how will we source it?

Avoid overlapping with other groups

It is also essential that you check whether there are already local organisations that carry out the same type of work your new group intends to do? You could research this on the internet, at your local library, with the local authority, or you could ask Northumberland CVA. If a similar group already exists, you could join that group instead. This is because duplication can be expensive and a waste of resources. It can create ill-feeling with those you compete with and it deters prospective

funderson. Joining an existing organisation and working with them instead will save a lot of hard work in getting set up as a new group and getting everything off the ground.

Getting started – think about the following questions:

- 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 will these people benefit?
- 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?
- How and where will funding be sought and who will do the fundraising?

Getting organised

Initially, there are usually three to four people who set up a group before getting to the point where they need to evolve into a management committee. A management committee can consist of any number, from three to several people.

Responsibility for the group should be shared between decision-makers, who will co-ordinate activities, make sure funding is in place and so on.

Your Management Committee will be responsible for ensuring that your group:

- Sets aims and objectives and plans ahead
- Works towards its aims and objectives,
- 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 set of rules (constitution)

Your group will need to have a Governing Document so that everyone knows who and what your organisation is, what it aims to do, how it will be run and who is responsible for running it.

You will also need a Governing Document in order to apply for money (grants/funding) that will enable you to deliver your service / activity / project.

The normal type of governing document for a small group is called a constitution (a set of rules) and will consist of the following:

- Name
- Objects
- Powers
- Committee
- Annual General Meeting
- Extraordinary General Meeting
- Procedure at General Meetings
- Bank Accounts and Annual Accounts
- Payments or benefits
- Amendments to the Constitution
- Dissolution

The constitution will need to be signed by the Management Committee and dated on the day it is adopted. 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.

Getting further support

Northumberland Community Voluntary Action (Northumberland CVA) can help you through the process of setting up a new community group. For more information, advice and support contact, email enquire@northumberlandcva.org.uk or call 01670 858688.