

Getting a group started

First steps when thinking about starting a new group, and links to further information.

What's the first step?

Just as there are many different reasons to form a group, there are many different types of group you could set up. It's worth thinking about what kind of group you imagine it will be, as this may affect the order you do things in.

For example, if you need to respond quickly to a proposal from the council that will affect your area, the first thing you'll need to do is get as many people as possible together, so that they can all contribute their ideas and energy. On the other hand, if you are planning to set up a charitable trust to run arts projects in the community, you will want to give some thought to the aims and structure of the group before you invite others to join you, so that you can be clear about what you are asking them to do.

You may find it useful to follow the RouteMap¹ on our website, as a way in to thinking about the type of group you want to set up.

Though you may do these things in a different order depending on the type of group you are setting up, most new groups will need to:

- ◆ Hold an initial meeting page 2
- ◆ Agree the aims of the group page 4
- ◆ Write a constitution page 4
- ◆ Open a bank account page 4
- ◆ Decide who will do what page 5

Each of these things involves several decisions and activities – here are some ideas and tips to get you started.



¹ <http://www.resourcecentre.org.uk/information/routemap/>

Hold an initial meeting

Below are a few ideas for making your first meeting attractive and interesting. You may also find it useful to look at our information on *Organising a Public Meeting*.

Publicise it well

The design of your publicity material is important. Think about who you are hoping to attract to the meeting, and make sure your poster or leaflet will catch their eye and give them a reason to come along to your meeting. Make sure the date, time and place of the meeting are clearly shown on the leaflet, and that it's very clear what the meeting is about.

If your meeting is going to be a large one, with as many people involved as possible, you will need to do as much publicity as you can. You could use:

- ♦ flyers through letterboxes
- ♦ posters in shop windows or on community noticeboards
- ♦ leaflets in places where the people you want to reach are likely to go
- ♦ a letter or advert in a community newsletter
- ♦ a piece in the local paper
- ♦ an announcement on the local radio
- ♦ an event on Facebook
- ♦ Twitter
- ♦ online event listings services

If your group is going to be quite small, for example a residents' association for a single block of flats or street, it is worth investing the time to call on people to invite them to the meeting personally. Even if they don't come, this will give you useful information about whether they think the group is a good idea and what they want it to do.

You can design and print your publicity at the Resource Centre². We have an information sheet on writing a *News release* and some useful addresses for *local media contacts*. We also have some good books on publicity in our reference library – just call in during our opening hours to have a browse.

Offer an incentive

Not many people enjoy meetings, and for some it is a big effort to arrange childcare or transport, so it's a good idea to offer an extra attraction. This could simply be free refreshments, or perhaps a video or speaker about something to do with the group's aims or activity.

The venue and facilities

Is it accessible to everyone? Are there steps or other barriers you should warn people about on the publicity leaflet? Will you need to put up signs to direct people as they

² <http://www.resourcecentre.org.uk/printing/>

arrive? If you have a speaker, will they need a data projector? Would it make things easier if you had a PA system or induction loop³? Will you need to organise a crèche⁴ or offer help with childcare costs? Might you need a sign language interpreter⁵?

The agenda

The amount of preparation you do before the meeting will depend on the type of group it is, but it's always good to have some idea of what needs to be covered in the meeting.

A typical agenda for an initial meeting would include:

- ♦ Welcome and introductions
- ♦ Aims of the group
- ♦ Name of the group
- ♦ Plans and ideas (and who will carry them out)
- ♦ Who will do what (responsibilities in general)
- ♦ Finances
- ♦ Date and time of the next meeting

We also have an information sheet on *Agendas*, to give you more detailed help with this.

If you have called the meeting, people will be expecting you to act as chair. If it's going to be a large meeting and you are not confident in this role, you could ask someone else to chair the meeting – perhaps a local councillor, teacher, religious leader or well-known community figure. But be careful that your choice of chair is not going to cause controversy in the meeting.

Our information on *Chairing meetings* provides some useful tips.

Involve everyone in the discussion

While it's important to appear well-organised, you also want to let people know that their contribution is needed and valuable, so make sure you don't close off discussion too quickly. The people who have come along to the meeting are the future members of the group, and you need to make sure the atmosphere of this meeting is as welcoming and open as possible.

Take minutes

The minutes of your meeting don't have to be very detailed, but they should include a clear note of any decisions made at the meeting, and in particular who has agreed to take on which jobs. It's not easy to chair a meeting and take minutes at the same time, so ask for a volunteer to take notes before the meeting or at the start of the meeting.

³ You can hire these things, and lots of other useful equipment, from the Resource Centre – see <http://www.resourcecentre.org.uk/equipment-category/equipment-for-meetings-displays-and-presentations/>

⁴ <http://www.resourcecentre.org.uk/information/organising-a-crche/>

⁵ <http://www.resourcecentre.org.uk/service/interpreting-and-translating/>

We have an information sheet on *Taking Minutes*, with some useful pointers.

Gather names and addresses

Make sure you take contact details from everyone who wants to be kept in touch with the group – prepare a sheet in advance which you can pass round the meeting or have on a table at the door.

Set a date for the next meeting

Allow some time to discuss this in the meeting, so that you can decide how often you want the group to meet, whether daytime or evening meetings are best suited to the members of your group, whether you need to offer childcare or transport to enable people to attend meetings, and so on.

It's not always possible to agree a meeting date that everyone can make, but it's important to make sure you aren't always excluding the same people just because you haven't thought about their needs.

Agree the aims of the group

It's a good idea to talk about the aims of the group at this first meeting, so that everyone is clear from the start about what the group is for. Make sure someone writes down what the meeting has agreed and check that everyone is happy with the wording.

Write a constitution

You can include your aims in a written constitution, and it's worth inviting a few people to volunteer to work on this and bring a draft back to the group.

If you are going to apply for grant funding, you will probably need a written constitution, to show funders that you are an organised group. Unless you are going to be a registered charity or a limited company, there are no legal rules about what your constitution should say.

Once you have written and agreed the constitution, however, it becomes the 'governing document' of your group, and it should set out clearly how you intend to run your group. A good constitution can help to resolve disputes and enable new members to participate fully in the running of the group.

Have a look at our information sheet on *Writing a Constitution*, which takes you through the process and includes example clauses and headings which you can use.

Open a bank account

Running any group costs money, and it's a good idea to start thinking at the beginning about where to get it from and how to look after it. As soon as your group has some money, you will want to give one person responsibility for keeping track of

it (the treasurer). We have information for treasurers and other committee members on managing your group's money⁶.

Having a group bank account is the best way to make sure the group's money is kept safely. Most high street banks offer special accounts for community groups. You will need to have at least two members of the group willing to act as signatories. Funders usually require (and it's a sensible precaution in any case) that you have a bank account where each cheque has to be signed by two people.

Our *bank accounts* information sheet provides advice about choosing a bank and how to open an account. It also includes a list of community bank accounts.

Decide who will do what

You may want to elect a committee with named officers (Chair, Secretary, etc), or just share out the work that needs doing immediately. Either way, everyone needs to know who is doing what, and when they will report back to the whole group.

How formal?

There is no right or wrong way to run a group – how formal your group will be depends on the wishes of the people involved and the aims and function of the group. Many groups change their structure as they develop, so there's no need to get bogged down in legal documents before you've even got off the ground.

On the other hand, it's worth giving the structure of your group some thought every now and then, to make sure you still have a set up that meets the needs of your group.

The Resource Centre has several information sheets in this area which different groups may find useful:

- ♦ The Secretary's role
- ♦ Chairing meetings
- ♦ Responsibilities of the Management Committee
- ♦ Community and voluntary groups – finding a legal structure to suit your group
- ♦ Not for Profit organisations – a guide to legal structures
- ♦ Charity registration
- ♦ Equal opportunities policy

What next?

Each group has its own strengths and weaknesses, but there are several common issues most community groups need to deal with as they carry out their activities. Here are some useful pointers to information and resources that might help:

⁶ <http://www.resourcecentre.org.uk/information-category/managing-money/looking-after-your-groups-money/>

Raising money

See our website section on *Raising Money* for information about different ways to raise money, contact details for funding bodies locally and advice on how to report back to funders if you are successful with your fundraising.

We have a subscription to www.trustfunding.org.uk which all groups are welcome to use at the Resource Centre. Please contact us to book a slot. There's a small charge for computer use.

Finding a place to meet

Some local organisations provide lists of rooms for hire locally. Community Base in Brighton has a database containing lots of local venue hire information. For this and other similar links, look at our list of organisations that provide information on rooms for hire⁷.

Publicity and communications

The Community Print Room at the Resource Centre has equipment for community groups to use to design, photocopy or print your leaflets, newsletters, letters and posters.

We also have computers you can use if you have no office facilities of your own.

See our website section on *Publicity and Communication* for a range of information sheets to help you get your message across effectively.

Organising events

The Resource Centre has an enormous range of equipment for hire to help community groups organise successful events.

See our website section on *Organising events and activities* for information and useful links for event organisers.

Involving volunteers

We have a list of organisations that can advise about managing volunteers⁸. It includes Brighton and Hove Volunteer Centre⁹, who provide useful information about good practice when using volunteers.

There are several local services where you can advertise for volunteers¹⁰.

⁷ <http://www.resourcecentre.org.uk/service/information-on-rooms-for-hire/>

⁸ <http://www.resourcecentre.org.uk/service/managing-volunteers/>

⁹ <http://www.bhcommunityworks.org.uk/volunteering/>

¹⁰ <http://www.resourcecentre.org.uk/service/finding-volunteers/>