

Factsheet 1: Setting Up a New Group

If you are interested in setting up a new voluntary or community organisation there can be an overwhelming 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 is not 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. Most of the points below are guidelines for good practice, but some reflect legal requirements and we have indicated where this is the case.

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?
- How are you planning to achieve it, i.e., what activities or services do you want to provide?
- Where do you want to do it?
- What area are you going to cover? For example, are you going only to cover Tyldesley or are you going to cover the whole of Wigan Borough? Be realistic about this - if you only have the resources to cover a small area do not try and overstretch yourself. On the other hand, you should also be planning – what might you want to be doing and what areas might you want to cover in five or even 10 years' time?

If you set your aims (also called purposes or objects) and your geographic area (also called area of benefit) too narrowly, it may be difficult to broaden them later.

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? Do not forget the implications of the group that you are 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.

The Equality Act 2010 applies if you are planning to work with a specific group defined by a 'protected characteristic' (disability, age, race, ethnic origin, nationality, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, marital or civil partnership status, pregnancy or maternity, gender reassignment, or religion or other belief). You should take advice to be sure it is legal to limit your activities or services in this way.



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 will not 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 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 roles and lessen the burden of information gathering it is important for your group to spend some time initially identifying tasks and goals and working out priorities. From this you can identify what needs to be done and share out the important roles. Doing this will ensure that everyone gets a role, everyone knows what they are working towards and no one person gets overloaded 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, and can show that a number of people are already involved.

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*”, usually called a constitution (or articles of association if the organisation is registered as a company), will outline how you all agree to work together, covering areas like your objects, beneficiaries and area of benefit, membership, members' meetings, the management committee, committee meetings, and how finances must be dealt with. One of your first tasks therefore will be to write a governing document or constitution, but first you will need to decide whether you want the organisation to be legally charitable (which has certain financial advantages but also has some restrictions on what it can do), and whether you want the organisation to be a company (which can reduce the risk of personal liability for members of the organisation and its management committee if the organisation gets into financial difficulties).



Wigan Borough Community Partnership can help you make these decisions and create a governing document for your group ensuring 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, ensuring that funders will be satisfied with your rules and precautions, and enabling the organisation to be registered as a charity and/or company if this is applicable.

Getting a committee

There is usually a group of people from within the membership of your organisation who will be responsible for governing your organisation, which means ensuring it is being run properly. The constitution might call them the Trustees, Board, Management Committee, Executive Committee, Steering Group, or a similar name. Because there are so many different terms, they are often referred to as the governing body or simply as the committee or board.

Whatever the committee is called, they are the people who deal with day-to-day management if the organisation does not have staff. Once it hires staff, the committee usually delegate some or all the day-to-day work to them, and the committee's role becomes one of making major decisions about work.

priorities, agreeing policies and budgets, receiving reports from the staff about the work and finances, and ensuring the work is being done within the framework agreed by the committee.

Depending on what your governing document says, the committee members may be elected by and from within the membership of your group, appointed by an external body, co-opted by the committee itself, and/or appointed in some other way.

Holding your first general meeting

General meetings, or a meeting of the members of your group, are usually the overall decision-making body for organisations. The General Meeting will be the ultimate body, to which the committee are accountable, and the place where elections are held. At the first of these meetings (which should afterwards be held at least once a year but may be held more often) you need to vote to agree your governing document (constitution) and to elect the first 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 to spend any money from the account.

This means having two signatories though it is 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. Before opening the account, the bank is likely to want to see the organisation's constitution, and proof of identity and address for the signatories.



Charity registration

If the organisation is set up in a way which is legally charitable (basically, all its objects as defined in the governing document are charitable as defined in the Charities Act 2006) it will have to register with the Charity Commission if it has already had income of £5000 or more, or when its annual income reaches £5000.

This is a legal requirement, and it is not up to the organisation to decide whether to register or not (though it can, at an earlier stage, decide to write its governing document in a way that ensures it is not legally charitable – in which case it will not need to register with the Commission, but will also not be entitled to the advantages of charitable status).

It is important to bear in mind that if the governing document is written in a way that is legally charitable, the organisation is a charity, it is subject to all aspects of charity law (except the very few that apply only to charities registered with the Commission) and is entitled to all the advantages of charitable status.

Insurance

If your organisation has any employees, even part-time, it must have employers' liability insurance – this is a statutory requirement. There are a number of other insurances that it may be required to have or may choose to have – see *Factsheet 18* for more about this.

Policies and procedures

These policies are not a prerequisite for stating a new organisation, however, we advise that legally and professionally it is good practice to have them in place. Also, more and more funders tend to request various policies and procedures before they fund you. It is therefore advisable that groups have them ready and available as soon as they can.

Essential policies and procedures

1. Equality and diversity
2. Health and safety – this is a legal requirement if the organisation has five or more employees but is good practice even if it is not a legal requirement.
3. Conflict of interest – for situations where a member's or especially a committee member's interests could be in conflict with those of the organisation.
4. Volunteering
5. Handling finance

Other Policies and Procedures to consider if relevant/specific to the services you offer.

1. Recruitment and selection – if the organisation is going to employ staff.
2. Safeguarding – this may be a legal requirement if the organisation works with these children or vulnerable adults and is good practice even if it is not a legal requirement.
3. Service user care – if the organisation is providing services to its members or beneficiaries.



4. Communications
5. Caring for the environment
6. Interpreting, if your organisation works with people for whom English is not their first language.
7. Providing advice and information if your organisation provides this service.

For more information and for sample policies and procedures, please visit the Versa Collective website: www.versacollective.org

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. This networking is also very attractive to funders.

