



Fact Sheet 1: Starting a new group

There are a considerable number of things to consider when setting up a new voluntary or community organisation. But if you tackle the process with a good plan of action and plenty of help and support it isn't as daunting as it might seem at first.

The most important considerations can be divided into two basic areas, the main points of which are covered below. These are only guidelines for good practice as there are no laws for voluntary and community organisations (unless they are also registered charities or incorporated as a company).

For more information please refer to **Fact Sheet 3: Management Committees**, **Fact Sheet 4: Planning Meetings** and **Fact Sheet 2: Constitutions**.

1: Things you need to ask, find out, or decide

What do you want to do?

You need to know exactly what your new group is going to do, e.g. offer a service to a community or only benefit its members? What are its aims? What do you want to achieve?

Where do you want to do it?

For example are you going to cover say a village, a town or the whole District? Be realistic; if you only have the resources to cover a small area don't try to over-stretch yourself.

Who do you want to do it with?

If you are providing a service you should identify a specific group of people you are going to work with, e.g. people affected by a specific issue or living in a defined area. Also, if you are going to work with several groups, you need to think carefully about any possible conflicts of interest.

Are you overlapping with other groups?

Once you have made these decisions, you need to find out if there is already a group doing similar things in the same area. Duplicating other groups' activities won't 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 any other groups or organisations?

If there are groups already doing something similar perhaps you could add on your idea to their already successful organisation, or 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 you need to do

Getting support

Start by thinking about who might be interested in getting involved in the group then advertise your intention to start a group through posters or 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

To avoid drowning under a pile of information, ideas and bureaucracy it is a good idea to spend time as a group identifying goals, thinking about how you can achieve them and sharing out tasks. This way everybody gets involved, everyone knows what they're working towards, and no one person has all the work piled on them. It will also make it easier to get funding and support if you have a clear vision of what you're trying to do

Having a constitution

You need to have a set of rules to govern exactly what your group does, how it does it and how you all work together. This is what a constitution does. One of your first tasks therefore is to write a constitution and officially adopt it. The important part of a constitution is that it reflects what you want to do now and how you want to do it and also allows you room for expansion and diversification in the future.

Getting a committee

There are usually people from within the membership of your group who will be responsible for the day to day running of the group – the Management Committee or the Executive Committee, elected by the membership. Some members of the Committee also take on specific roles within the Committee including Chair, Treasurer, and Secretary.

Holding your first General Meeting

General Meetings are usually the overall decision-making body for the group as they are attended by the whole membership. It is at the first meeting that you will need to vote to officially adopt your Constitution and to elect the Committee.

Opening a Bank Account

Once you have a group set up you will need not only a means of managing the group but also a means of managing your finances, so it is important that you open a bank account. The account should be opened in the name of the group and should have two signatories for all cheques. It is a good idea for groups to have three or four signatories on an account of whom any two can sign cheques to provide cover for when committee members are on holiday or unable to sign cheques for the group.

3: Sources of help and advice

Other groups

Very often many of the problems or difficulties you may face will have been faced and overcome by other groups in the past. Working in partnership, sharing information and networking with other groups who are doing similar things or who are working in the same area can be an invaluable source of support and information.

VASA can provide a personalised service to assist you with every stage of starting a new group. Please contact Dominic Momcilovic for advice on 01789 298102 or by email dominic.momcilovic@vasa.org.uk