

Essential Guide to Forming a Group or Starting a Project

How to Set Up a Community Group or Project

Got a good idea? Want to help your community? Not quite sure how to get your idea off the ground?

Creating a team

All good ideas require the support of others. Creating a team with a mix of skills and qualities will help create a clear plan that can be put into action to achieve your aims.

Clarity of mission and purpose

At the beginning of a project it is worth spending time to agree on and produce a clear statement about the mission of the project. This will outline what the project is going to do to make a difference. Communicate it clearly to all stakeholders, board, staff, donors, volunteers, partners and the public – so that everyone understands its goals and works towards a common purpose. Some of the activities that might help you to achieve this is to undertake a SWOT analysis (Skills, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats).

Aims and Objectives

Once the need for the project and potential impacts have been identified, the aims and objectives need to be drawn up to add more detail to the mission and purpose. Objectives are the steps or actions to be taken to achieve the aims of the project. They need to be **Specific, Measurable, Agreed, Realistic and Timed (SMART)**. This will help when writing applications for funds and will measure the success or otherwise of the project.

Action Plan

Creating an Action Plan/Business Plan brings the idea nearer to fruition. Things to consider are:

- **Risk Assessment** - what are the potential risks to Trustees/Board Members/stakeholders? Risks to the project achieving its aims and objectives are crucial for the trustees to understand and take steps to avert or reduce the impact of the risks identified.
- **Identifying Assets** - identify assets that you have already—skills, experience, premises, evidence of need, community support, etc.
- **Creating a budget** - costing the work, contingencies, income generation.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation** - creating systems to collect data for reporting and learning from experience.

Choosing a Structure

There are a variety of legal structures that will support what you want to do. The options are to remain as an unconstituted group, register as a charity or Charitable Interest Organisation (CIO) or become a Community Interest Company (CIC). 3VA has produced a guide called “Legal Structures at a Glance” to give you an overview and will provide group/individual support in registering/complying with legal requirements.

Essential Policies

A written set of rules are essential to set out how the group will conduct itself and protect its members. If funds are sought, most grant making bodies will require you to send:

- Constitution or statement of the rules the group uses when it meets to make decisions
- Board/Trustee Details
- Recent bank statements
- Public Liability Insurance
- Vulnerable Adults and Child Protection Policies (if relevant)
- Health and Safety policy
- Equal Opportunities Policy

3VA will help you create policies appropriate for your group and help with creating a system for them to be regularly reviewed and updated.

Seven Essential Functions

The National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) has provided a checklist of seven essential functions that successful community groups perform. This checklist can be used as a self-evaluation tool.

1. Communicates vision and mission
2. Engages and seeks stakeholders’ input in designing programmes, including people who use its services, and serve its target community appropriately
3. Achieves results and track impact against a few key measures
4. Manages an active and informed governance structure
5. Secures resources appropriate to its needs
6. Plans- anticipates opportunities, maximise strengths, identify weaknesses, be flexible
7. Adapts – organisation learns from its results, from new knowledge in the field, from its stakeholders and evolves, adapting to new situations and opportunities.

More information and support

3VA offers courses on many of the subjects covered within this Essential Guide. For current courses, please visit our website at www.3va.org.uk and explore training and events pages or contact Martina Taylor on 01323 639 373.

Individual support is also be provided by our Community Development Team.

For more resources, visit www.3va.org.uk.

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