

When people come together for a particular reason and form a group, whether it's a response to a crisis or to meet a need, there is often a common agreement between themselves as to why they have come together, what it is they have come to do and how they are going to do it.

Where to start

As a group you will need to gather together to discuss ideas and decide what the purpose of the group is going to be and what you want to do, thinking about:

- What are your aims? Who is it for? Is there a target audience?
- How this will be achieved in terms of practical work/activities?
- Avoid duplication! Is someone already doing something similar? Could you work in partnership with them?
- Who will be involved in making sure it happens?
- How will your activities be paid for?
- What liabilities might you have e.g. staff, property, assets

Formalising your group

Establishing a group is more than just selecting the right structure and governing document. Holding your first General Meeting; forming the committee, creating an action plan, opening a bank account and getting support are also essential elements of getting your group off the ground.

Selecting a Structure

There are various ways and tools to help you to select the right structure for your group. However, it is advisable to seek legal advice on this. To help you to get started please refer to our guidance sheet titled "Governance" which explains each of these structures in greater detail, giving examples of activities they would be appropriate for.

Governing Document

The Governing Document acts as the instruction manual for those involved in the group on what it can and can't do, how the members of the group should manage themselves to achieve this, will let you do things like open a bank account and obtain funding, which might be useful to pay for the insurance you might need. Model documents are available from a variety of sources; see the 'More information' section for details. ACT also has a factsheet about drafting a simple constitution (see over page).

Rather than lying locked away in a filing cabinet, the governing document should be available to be seen by every member of the group. A copy must be given to every member of the "management committee" or group when it is established and as and when new people join.

Group structure

- What are your aims?
- How will this be achieved?
- Who will be involved in doing this, could you work in partnership with other groups?

Formalising the group

- Select a structure
- Write your governing document
- Hold your first general meeting and form the committee

First steps

- Open a bank account
- Investigate insurance requirements
- Develop an Action Plan

Next steps

- Establish support for your group from potential users
- Make contact with support organisations
- Assess your group's finances – funding or subscriptions or both?

Establishing support

Once you've decided that you're ready to start your group, it's a good idea to make contact with others who might be interested in supporting or joining the group; using posters, leaflets, local radio interviews, local press coverage etc in the area where your target group might be.


Sources of help

It's unlikely that any difficulties or problems that you might face are new, and contacting organisations such as ACT and Cumbria CVS can often provide tried and tested solutions to them.

They can also signpost you to support networks, provide information and advice and guidance on sources of funding.

Funding for your group

You will need to think about how your group will be financed, e.g. operating a membership organisation with a paid subscription or external funding through grants etc. This will enable you to develop a budget (see Budget Planning Guidance sheet for further information).



Factsheet: Drafting a simple constitution

1: What is a constitution?

Many voluntary groups are relatively small in terms of the amounts of money and staff that they have. These organisations are called **Unincorporated Associations**. This is because they are not incorporated (i.e. they aren't a registered company) and they are a group of people working together to mutually agreed aims. This type of group has a particular kind of agreement governing how it is run - a Constitution. This is a set of agreed rules governing how an organisation will be run, how the members will work together and what they are working towards.

Some groups prefer to remain informal and not adopt a constitution. For others, however, a constitution is not only an effective tool for running an organisation, but actually a requirement because of the activities they are undertaking. For example, a group that wishes to register as charity, or undertake to provide services in a community, or apply for funding, will face problems if they do not have a constitution.

A constitution is also a way of ensuring that the public and funding bodies feel confident that a group is being run properly and its money is managed properly.

2: A constitution must have...

Name
Choose your own. It might reflect the area or the field in which you work.

Objects
This section sets out what the group aims to do. If your group wants to register as a Charity then you will need to consider whether or not these objects will fit in with what the Charity Commission defines as Charitable.

Powers
This covers what a group can do to achieve its aims. These are things such as:

- Fundraising
- Networking
- Hiring equipment/premises
- Employing staff

Membership
A group's membership would be made up of people who were interested in working together to achieve the aims of the group. To become a member a person would have to sign a membership agreement and, if the group wished, pay a membership fee.

If a fee was payable, then there would be rules about who **couldn't** be a member.

The following groups would be excluded from membership if an organisation was to be a charity:

- People under 18
- People who are bankrupt
- People who have an unspent conviction
- People who are unable to look after their own financial affairs.

ACT working with the people and communities of Cumbria to realise their potential
Charity No. 1080875 Company No: 3957858
Voluntary Action Cumbria, The Old Stables, Redhills, Penrith, CA11 0DT

ACT Factsheet – Drafting a simple constitution



Heart of Eden Community Plan Group – Feb 2010
Photo by www.edenvalleymessenger.com

Useful websites

www.cumbriaaction.org.uk

www.thirdsectorcumbria.org.uk

www.charity-commission.org.uk

More information

ACT Development Officers can offer further support and advice. A range of additional Guidance Sheets are also available on our website. Guidance on how to obtain model documents is also available.

Cumbria CVS can help with funding information; for more details visit the Third Sector Cumbria website (see Useful Websites)

For more information please contact us at Action with Communities in Cumbria on Tel: 01768 840827 or visit our website: www.cumbriaaction.org.uk

Supporting communities ... championing rural issues

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