

Full Guide:

Setting up a voluntary or community group

Many 'good works' happen in the life of a community without any need for an organisation.

However, a wide range of projects and activities do need some sort of structure to function properly. A voluntary or community group is an organisation which enables these types of activities to take place.

The characteristics of a voluntary or community group can include:

- Run on a 'not for profit' basis, i.e. the activity is not set up to make a profit which is paid to shareholders.
- Its work has a social or environmental benefit.
- It is run, usually entirely, by volunteers at management committee level, although there may also be paid staff.
- There is more than one person involved in running the group.
- Voluntary groups can sometimes, but don't have to, employ staff.

How a group is run

When a voluntary organisation or community group is formed, it has to have some direction and be managed by someone. This is usually a group of people who meet on a regular basis and consider issues such as:

- how the group is organised
- how the group can achieve what it was set up to do
- how to raise funds
- whether to recruit staff and/or volunteers
- how current activities are progressing
- whether the group should be carrying out different activities
- how to address problems

This group of people is usually called the management committee or board of trustees. The management committee decides the organisation's policies and values, oversees its general administration and is responsible for looking after finances and assets.

Depending on the size of the organisation, more day-to-day jobs may be delegated to staff, other volunteers, or sub-committees.

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Choosing a structure for the group

It is important to choose an appropriate structure for your group. Whether you choose a formal or informal structure, the group must be run in the best way to achieve its aims.

To find out more about the various structures available, read our information sheet 'Get Legal' available at http://www.devonva.org/information_and_guidance

Considering a governing document

When you have chosen which structure is most appropriate for you, you will need to write out a set of rules which enable the organisation to function well. This governing document has a different name depending on the type of organisation you have chosen to set up. It could be called, for example; a Constitution, Trust Deed or Memorandum and Articles.

Whatever the nature of the document, it is important that it has enough information in it to enable the organisation to run smoothly.

In order to draft a constitution of any sort, these are the minimum points you need to consider:

- What is the purpose of the organisation?
- Who will run the organisation?
- What powers and responsibilities will the management committee have?
- Where will you be based?
- Will the organisation have members?
- What are the rights of the members?
- How do you elect the management committee?
- How will meetings of the management committee be organised?
- How often will management committee meetings take place?
- How will the accounts be managed and examined?
- Who is responsible for your assets?
- When will you have your Annual General Meeting?
- How do you call a Special General Meeting?
- How can the organisation be dissolved?

This is one in a series of information sheets produced by DeVA on subjects of interest to voluntary and community groups. It is intended for guidance only and is not a comprehensive statement of the law. Last updated February 2014. Please note that links may become out of date and invalid.

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More information about drafting an appropriate governing document is available from the Charity Commission.

A sample basic constitution is also available from the Charity Commission at:

<http://www.charitycommission.gov.uk/detailed-guidance/registering-a-charity/choosing-and-preparing-a-governing-document-cc22/#5>

Devon Voluntary Action (DeVA) can help to get started. Call us on 0845 6099901 or email support@devonva.org

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