

Setting up & developing a voluntary community group

Before setting up a community groups there are things you need to think about

Purpose of the Group:

- **What are the main aims?** – What is your vision and what do you hope to achieve? Eg to improve education? To provide information? To equip young people? To develop skills? To aid integration? To develop potential & what potential? -
- **Who is it for? Who are your customers?** – Be specific - is it for the whole community, or to target people of a certain age range; for both men and women, what ethnic group, any special needs etc? – Have you proof these people need the support / services you want to offer?
- **Who are your members?** – these may be different from your clients but are the people who would have a say in what happens and may bring expertise into the organisation
- **What area will you serve?** Where are you going to be based? Where will the people come from? Will you expect to expand? How?
- **What activities are you expecting to do?** – What services will you provide? How long? How often? What time? Where? Who is it for? Who will do it? –Think realistically for both the short term and long term
- **Who else provides the same type of services?** – Who are your competitors? What will be different and distinctive about your services than others? How can you work with the other groups?
- **Can you work in partnership with another group?** – can you complement what another is doing? Running an organisation takes a lot of hard work and resources and being in competition does not always help your clients – funders are looking for partnership working

You need know answers to these questions so that you can monitor how successful your organisation has been

Resources:

- **Human Resources**
 - How many people are interested in developing, supporting or running the organisation?
 - What time commitment have these people got? In short term and long term? It takes time and commitment to set up and run an organisation
 - Who is going to be on the committee? You need the minimum of 3 people to start an organisation – a chair, a secretary and a treasurer, but in the end you will probably need more people to help organise and run the organisation.
 - Does everyone have a shared vision? - If you do not have a shared vision then everyone will start to want to pull the organisation indifferent directions

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- What skills and training do they need? How can they get these? Eg organizing and chairing meetings, minute taking, administration, fundraising, IT skills, basic bookkeeping, specific skills for the services you want to provide, communication etc
- **Physical**
 - Where do you expect to run the organisation? How much will it cost? Is it adequate for your clients and for the purpose you need it for? – Is there an organisation you could join up with to rent or share office space?
 - What equipment do you need? Be realistic – think short-term not just long-term. Where would these be stored?
- **Financial**
 - How much money do you need at the minimum to run your services?
 - How are you going to get money? – eg from membership fees, payment for service, grants, gifts, legacies, tax rebate, contracts or providing a service for another organisation
 - Will you have to have good financial controls in place

What you need to do:

- **Bring a team together** – You can not do this on your own – divide the work load amongst yourselves – give yourselves realistic target dates – you will need to meet regularly and with relevant people – keep minutes of all your meetings, discussions and findings
- **Research** – Think about the above questions – consult the right people, talk to your second tier organisations like – the more research you do the stronger your organisation could become. Your research needs to look not only at the above questions but also what other external factors will affect your organisation eg what is happening in your neighborhood or the political environment. Explore your own strengths and weaknesses and how you can overcome them. Be aware of the legal responsibilities of setting up an organisation. Be inclusive of those who have an interest and stake in the organisation.
- **Needs assessment of the community** – what proof do you have of the needs of a new organisation and services
- **Develop a shared vision and goals** – This is essential for good team work and for structuring your services
- **Is the project organisation really needed?** What added value would you bring or would it be better to support an existing organisation?
- **Do a feasibility study** – Can you run the group – What are the minimum resources you need? Have you got them? How would you get them?
- **Develop a name for your group** – You can not use the name of another group or organisation. Try and make it relevant to the services and/or community and/or area you will be reaching
- **Decide on the type of governing body you need to be** – the governing document will determine how the management style, organisation runs and its legal status. The type of governing document you have will depend on the type of services you will provide and how you propose to run the organisation. You may become a:

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- A non constituted organisation with terms of reference
- A charity
- A company limited by guarantee
- A Social Enterprise

The governing document also affects the type of funding you can apply for
You will not have to develop these legal documents from scratch – there are basic templates you can use which can be adapted for your purposes

- **Set up a bank account** – If your organisation is going to have funding even if it is from members or gifts you need to have a separate bank account - you will need to have 2 signatures. It is often helpful to have another person who can sign cheques to cover for a committee member who may be on holiday or away.

Once formally constituted you need to:

- **Develop action plans** – how, when, where you want to start, how you will advertise, who you will inform, how you will network with other groups, agencies and service providers – Action plans should be for one year and 3 years ahead. They should include budgets. They should state a timetable and who is responsible to do the work and how you will monitor and evaluate what you have done. The action plan will help you sort out your priorities
- **Develop policies and procedures** – If you are going to work with young people or venerable adults you will need to have the relevant. If you are working with volunteers it is a good idea to have a volunteer and equals opportunity policy in place and have given thought to supervision etc. You can adapt many of the templates for these specific for your organisation
- **CRB checks** – if you are going to work with children or venerable adults you will need to have a CRB check
- **Insurance** – you should get a public liability insurance or insure you are covered by someone else's insurance when you are providing services
- **General Meeting** – At the first general meeting the constitution should be officially adopted and procedures set out there in followed which probably will involve electing committee members and agreeing the financial statement
- **Develop longer-term visions and goals** – use the wealth of experience you have in your organisation and respond to the changing needs and situations

ENJOY RUNNING YOUR GROUP AND APPRECIATE THE CONTRIBUTION YOU ARE MAKING
YOU TOO WILL GAIN - MORE SKILLS, MORE CONFIDENCE & PRIDE