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The Practicalities of Setting up a New Group

People set up groups for different reasons, either to create the opportunity for people to take part in a new activity or to learn a new skill, or to address an identified need in their community. Whatever the reason, a well-organised and structured group will bring great benefit to its members and to the community it serves. Below are helpful hints to help you get off to a good start.

The first thing to do is check if there is a group already in existence that is doing something similar, as you could join that one and pool resources. If not, then make sure you have a core group of people to set up the group with you so that you can share out the work. Make sure you are all in agreement as to what the aim of the group is as that will help define its activities.

First meeting

This can be an informal meeting, or if you think there will be a lot of people attending, a more structured one can be organised. If the group size is going to be quite small to start with, you can simply meet up in someone's house to decide how the group is going to be run and agree who will take what role in running it. It's a good idea to advertise the meeting to attract possible members.

An agenda is also very useful, especially if there is a high attendance, and you need someone to chair the meeting and someone to take notes. On the agenda should be:

Background information - Why there is a need for this group, how it has come about etc

Name of group - if the group does not already have a name, now would be a good time to ask for suggestions and then vote on it.

Constitution – it is advisable to have a constitution, which is a document setting out the aims and rules of the group. It is a statement of what your group is going to do and how it is going to do it. It is important because:

- Without this written understanding people in your groups may not be clear about what you're doing and the work won't get done.
- Funders will want to see your group is democratic and accountable. This involves having a clear procedure by which decisions are made.
- It provides guidance to resolve issues that may come up.



Constitutions usually set out who are the members, committee and officers and sets out when and the way in which meetings will be held. It will also include rules about finances and how to dissolve the organisation.

If no constitution has been drawn up at your first meeting, ask for volunteers to work on it separately and bring it to the next meeting.

Development Officers from CVS can help you with this and there are template constitutions which can be used. Once a constitution has been drafted, it can be circulated before the meeting so that people have a chance to study it. If the majority agree with the constitution then it can be approved by the meeting

Election of committee members – The committee is the team of people who run the group on behalf of the members. The officers are usually Chair, Treasurer and Secretary and are elected every year. The Chair provides leadership for the group, sets the meeting agendas and makes sure they run smoothly. The Secretary is the link with external organisations and agencies and also between members and the Committee. The Secretary takes the minutes at meetings and looks after the administration of the group. The Treasurer keeps account of any money that passes through the group and presents a financial report to the AGM.

These roles may be varied to reflect the nature of the group's activities but it is important to ensure that the basic responsibilities are covered. Groups will usually decide to have a small number of additional committee members without specific duties to deal with other matters as they arise.

At this first meeting nominations are made for the committee and voted on. The new committee members will then sign the approved constitution. After that the group can get started in earnest, setting a date for the next meeting and beginning the group activities. In a smaller group situation, you can simply decide amongst yourselves who will take on which role

Opening a bank account

Once you have a signed constitution you will be able to open a community bank account to hold money on behalf of the organisation this should be done as soon as possible and particularly if the group want to apply for a grant as funders will require this.

Transactions (such as signing cheques) will need to be authorised by more than one committee member. This helps to reduce the risk of fraud by having more than one person with oversight of financial transactions. A common practice is for the group to require two committee members to authorise any individual transaction but to have a pool of three or four members empowered to do so. Most High Street banks will offer the facility of free banking for community groups but it is worth shopping around for the best deal.

Some groups have reported struggling to find a suitable bank locally and an alternative to consider might be an online account.

Below are two online accounts are suitable for voluntary sector banking but others are also available.

- Charities Aid Foundation <https://www.cafonline.org/charity-finance-fundraising/banking/current-account.aspx>
- Unity Bank <https://www.unity.co.uk/banking-services/internet-banking/>

The British Bankers Association have published a helpful guide on Banking for Charities