

Starting Up A Community Group - Getting People To Work Well Together

Make your group as effective as possible

Welcome new members

- Be inclusive NOT exclusive.
- Don't use lots of jargon at meetings - this bewilders and will put off new people straight away.
- Try to identify new members' strengths and give them a part to play that uses those strengths.

Identify your goals

Creating a mission statement will help the group focus and create common goals and targets as well as establishing an agreed way of achieving those goals.

Share the load

- Allow everyone to take on some of the responsibility and workload. This will avoid some team members feeling frustrated and put upon and at the same time prevent others feeling unfulfilled and excluded.
- If one person wants to control and dominate all the time try introducing a 'floating' or 'revolving' chair at meetings - this will give everyone who wants to a chance of taking the lead.
- Another way of avoiding such a problem long term might be to have elected 'officers' e.g., Chair, Secretary and Treasurer who have to be re-elected every year with the previous position holder being excluded from being re-elected for 2 to 3 years after holding office (but this will not be practical in many small groups or those with only short term goals).

Tell people what you are doing!

- Regularly update both everyone in the group and the outside world about how you are progressing.
- Leaflets and newsletters are cheap effective tools for informing both your members and the community of what you are doing - and are a good way of seeking new recruits to the group!

The next stage we will look at will be how to formalise the group and its activities.

Formalizing the group

In order to be able to be really recognised in order to attract or be eligible for potential funding you will need to be able to demonstrate your group is both run democratically and is open to the whole community.

You will therefore have to formalise a committee to steer the group. Such a committee will need to have a minimum of 3 identified positions with recognised responsibilities. These are:

The Chair - to run meetings and ensure the group is on course.

The Secretary - to prepare minutes and agendas for meetings and be responsible for ensuring the membership and the wider world are informed of what the group is doing and planning.

The Treasurer - takes responsibility for the groups finances and for maintaining the records of income and expenditure.

In order to be able to keep track of who is responsible for doing what and when the group should draw up a **Constitution**. This document at a minimum should outline:

- How the group is organised.
- Who is responsible for what.
- How committee members are selected and made accountable.

The minimum information such a Constitution would therefore contain would be:

- **The name of the group**
- **The aims of the group (effectively a Mission Statement)**
- **Who is eligible to join the group**
- **An Equal Opportunities statement**
- **The General Rules the group has agreed to and the procedure required to alter or amend these rules and regulations**
- **Details for an Annual General Meeting**
- **An outline of financial recording and accountability**
- **Quorum details - (details of the minimum number of people attending a group meeting for it to be considered 'legal' and binding on all members)**
- **The procedure in place for shutting down and winding up the group and its activities (including how any group assets will be disposed of)**

All of these points are very important - especially if you are going to be dealing with money - **especially other peoples!**

Roles of the Committee Members

The Chairperson

The Chairperson is expected to be the central figure for the Committee and its meetings. Their main roles are to:

- Organise the meetings jointly with the Secretary, and set the agendas for each.
- Start and run the meeting according to the agenda and to the timescale set.
- Make sure that discussions and debates are kept under control and are relevant to the meeting.

- Ensure that people wishing to speak can do so, and that they get a chance to express their views and get a fair hearing
- See that decisions are made and agreed - where a vote is evenly split, the Chairperson may be required to use a "casting vote", which will be additional to the one they have in their own right.
- Help share out the work of the organisation.
- Make sure people do the jobs they were allocated and which they promised to do.
- Settle any disagreements fairly.
- Represent the group to the outside world.

There is obviously a lot expected of the Chairperson. Some groups have co-chairpersons who share the tasks between them. In larger organisations, a Vice-Chairperson is often essential.

The Secretary

Secretaries are responsible for the paperwork and other administration of the group. Their main roles are to:

- Find out what people want to discuss at meetings and prepare the agenda in consultation with the Chairperson.
- Book the meeting room, check seating, access, toilet, refreshments etc.
- Sending out the agenda and notices for meetings.
- Dealing with any correspondence which might have arisen and preparing this for the meeting.
- Taking notes of proceedings during the meetings which will be used for the minutes.
- Write the minutes, circulate them and keep an official minute book.
- Keep records of members names and addresses.
- Store all the group's files of paperwork in a suitable place.
- Deal with press and publicity.

This job may well be split into several "assistant secretary" roles, e.g. Minutes Secretary, Membership Secretary, Public Relations Officer etc.

The Treasurer

Money matters sometimes seem daunting or can create anxiety. In addition, unless the group becomes a company limited by guarantee, committee members can be personally liable for any debts incurred by the group. The Treasurer has a vitally important job. Their main role is to:

- Control of the group's money - keeping record "books" of how the cash has actually been acquired and spent.
- Setting out a clear system of receipts and debts and keeping it up to date.
- Producing balance sheets and other financial information for group members.
- Paying bills, signing cheques and keeping details of these transactions.
- Preparing budgets for future income and expenditure.
- Arranging for the books to be audited and presented to the Annual General Meeting.
- Investing surplus funds in accounts which will yield interest.