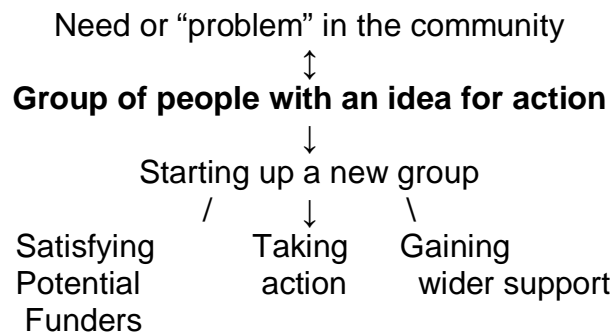


This is one of a series of Factsheets for voluntary and community groups issued by West Norfolk VCA. This factsheet assumes that you are setting up a “charitable” group. But, even if non-charitable, most of the points still apply.

## 1. An idea and a vision shared by several people

The life of a community or voluntary group starts with an idea.



This factsheet describes what needs to be done to turn it into a group which can galvanise support, and take action.

## 2. Starting a new community or voluntary group - the steps to follow

- Decide on the name
- Get a group together to brainstorm the aims
- Draft a constitution (seek advice on this, as it is likely to be important to include “charitable” aims; also there are clauses which funders require to see, e.g. dissolution clause)
- Advertise your first public meeting – open to all comers. Advertise in local newspapers and distribute invitations widely, give at least 14 days notice. Elect committee members and officers and adopt the constitution formally.
- First committee meeting
  - i. Arrange to open a bank account with 2 or more signatories

- ii. Take out insurance – where applicable - for employer's liability, buildings & contents, public liability, professional indemnity, and ensure employees/volunteers have car insurance covering them for business use
  - iii. Develop policies for equal opportunities, health & safety, discipline/grievance, data protection & confidentiality
  - iv. Consider whether to co-opt onto committee e.g. key people from funders or local community
  - v. Confirm employment terms and conditions for paid staff (if applicable)
  - vi. Decide when to hold first AGM.
- Later tasks include:
    - i. Appoint independent examiner/auditor of accounts
    - ii. Consider whether to apply to Charity Commission for registration as a charity (however it may be best to delay doing this for 12/18 months, until the organisation and its aims and objectives have “settled down”)
    - iii. Hold AGM at which reports will be presented on first year's activity and accounts.
  - Remember that committee members (sometimes called Trustees) must not gain any financial benefits from the group – that's what “charitable” means. Payment for expenses necessarily incurred, e.g. travelling expenses, is acceptable but payment for services is not. (See Charity Commission regulations for exceptions to this)

## **2. Developing Your Group**

Apart from the structural aspects considered in 2 above, you will also want to put your new group on a good footing. One or all of the following will be important:

- i. Having a clear vision and aims around which you can gather support.
- ii. Gathering support from friends and members of the community.
- iii. Getting key people in statutory agencies (e.g. Borough/District Council, Health, Social Services, Police, etc.) on your side
- iv. Finding out what other organisations (statutory, private or voluntary) provide the same or similar services and agreeing with them ways in which you can work together.
- v. Getting people onto your committee with a good mix of skills – try and have someone who works in a key statutory/voluntary organisation (or has very good links with

- statutory/voluntary organisations), someone with vision, someone good at practical details, someone good at writing.
- vi. Working out a plan of action – you can't do everything at once, and some things will have to wait while other things take priority.
  - vii. The committee working together as a team, and having an understanding of its role and responsibilities.
  - viii. Seeking funding for your first project or projects (or it may be that you can make things happen without funding, just with your own voluntary efforts)
  - ix. Setting up communications, e.g. advertising how people can contact you, and join the group, and getting a good relationship with local press and radio.
  - x. Being well organised e.g.
    1. Keeping notes of meetings, and copies of letters sent
    2. Having a filing system
    3. Setting up an office with filing drawers, telephone, word processor etc. even if it's at home.

### **3. Developing the Skills and Knowledge you need**

- Some of the steps and action suggested above will require you, and your group to seek expert advice
- Other matters will give rise to training needs for you, and the committee members of your group.

**West Norfolk Voluntary and Community Action (WNVCA)** Development Workers will be pleased to advise you on all aspects of: setting up a new group, writing a constitution, funding, problem-solving ... and more. It would be good to encourage your Committee Members to learn about the Roles and Responsibilities of Trustees – ask WNVCA about training opportunities.

#### **Further useful reading:**

- Voluntary but not Amateur – a guide to the law for vol. orgs. And community groups by Jacki Reason, Ruth Hayes & Duncan Forbes, published October 2000 by LVSC
- Community Startup – how to start a community group and keep it going by Caroline Pinder published 1995 by NRC & Community Matters.
- Toolkit for Change – the Groundswell Self Help Manual published by Groundswell UK
- Ideas into Action – starting up a voluntary or community organisation – Norfolk Information 2006