

If you are interested in setting up a new voluntary or community organisation there can be a vast number of things to consider. There are decisions to be made, information to be gathered, and jobs to do. If you tackle this process with a good plan of action and plenty of help and support then it isn't as daunting as it might seem at first.

Some of the most important considerations can be split up into two basic areas, the main points of each of these areas are covered below. However these are only guidelines for good practice as there are no laws for voluntary and community organisations (unless they are also registered charities).

For more information please refer to **Factsheet 2: Constitutions**, **Factsheet 3: Management Committees** and **Factsheet 4: Annual General Meetings**.

1: Things that you need to ask, find out, or decide

What do you want to do?

You need to have a specific idea about exactly what the group you are setting up is going to do. Will it offer a service to a community or will it be of benefit solely to its members? What are the aims of this group? What do you want to achieve?

Where do you want to do it?

What area are you going to cover? For example are you going only to cover Pinehurst or are you going to cover the whole of Swindon? Be realistic about this - if you only have the resources to cover a small area don't try and overstretch yourself.

Who do you want to do it with?

If you are providing a service then you may want to identify a specific group of people with whom you are going to work, for example people affected by a specific issue or living in a defined area. Also, if you are going to work with several groups, then you need to think carefully about any possible conflicts of interest.

Are you overlapping with other groups?

Once you have made these decisions, you need to do a bit of research and find out if there is already a group doing the same kind of things you want to do in the same area. Duplicating what other groups are doing won't help you when it comes to trying to get support, funding or volunteers so it is a good idea to ensure that what you want to do is new and/or unique in some way **before** you start.

Could you work in partnership with any other groups or organisations?

If there are groups already doing something similar perhaps you could make your idea an addition to their already successful organisation, or perhaps you could work together to develop something new. If you are in a similar geographical area then you could perhaps share premises and work together for the benefit of both groups.

FACTSHEET 1

2: Things that you need to do

Getting support

Start by thinking about who might be interested in getting involved in the group. Then you can start advertising your intentions to start up a group by using posters or leaflets etc in areas where this target group might go, for example a local community centre, doctor's surgery or school.

Developing an action plan

If you are going to make sure that you don't drown under a pile of information, ideas and bureaucracy then it is a good idea to spend time as a group identifying goals, thinking about how you can achieve them and sharing out tasks. This way everybody gets involved, everyone knows what they're working towards, and no one person has all the work piled on them. It will also make it easier to get funding and support if you have a clear and agreed vision of what you're trying to do and where you want to get to.

Adopting a constitution

If you are going to set yourselves up as a group then you really need to have a set of rules that will govern exactly what your group does, how it does it and how you all work together. This is what a constitution does. One of your first tasks therefore is to write a constitution and officially adopt it. VAS has copies of a model on which you can base your constitution. The important part of a constitution is that it reflects what you want to do now and how you want to do it and also allows you room for expansion and diversification in the future.

Getting a committee

There is usually a group of people from within the membership of your group who will be responsible for the day to day running of the group. The constitution might call them the Management Committee or the Executive Committee. The Committee are elected by the membership. Some members of the Committee also take on specific roles within the Committee including Chair, Treasurer, Secretary etc.

Holding your first General Meeting

The General Meetings are usually the overall decision-making body for the group as it is made up of the whole membership. It is at the first meeting that you will need to vote to officially adopt your Constitution and to elect the Committee.

Opening a Bank Account

Once you have a group set up you will need not only a means of managing the group - a constitution - but also a means of managing your finances. For this reason it is important that you open up a bank account. The account should be opened in the name of the group and should have 2 signatories for all cheques. It is often a good idea for groups to have 3 or 4 signatories on an account of whom any 2 can sign cheques to cover when committee members are on holiday or unable to sign cheques for the group.

3: Sources of help and advice

Other groups

Very often many of the problems or difficulties that you may face will have been faced and overcome by other groups in the past. Working in partnership, sharing information and networking with other groups who are doing similar things or who are working in the same area can be an invaluable source of support and information.