

Fact sheet 1

Starting a New Voluntary/Community Organisation (VCO)

Some of the most important considerations are covered below. However, these are only guidelines for good practice.

1) Things you need to find out or decide

- **What you do**
Be clear about what your group 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 you do it**
What area will you cover? Be realistic about this if - you only have the resources to cover a small area don't try and overstretch yourself. Don't forget you can always start small and expand your target area later on.
- **Who you do it with**
If you provide a service then you may want to identify a specific group of people with whom you will work, for example, people affected by a specific issue or living in a defined area. 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?**
You need to find out if there is already a group doing what you want to do in the same area. Duplicating what other groups do won't help you when it comes to trying to get support, funding or volunteers. 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 add your idea to their already successful organisation. Perhaps you could work together to develop something new. If you are in the same area you could perhaps share premises and work together for the benefit of both groups.

2) Things you need to do

- **Get support**
Start by thinking about who might get involved in the group. Then you can start advertising your intentions to start up a group by using posters or leaflets in places where your target group might go, for example a local community centre, doctor's surgery or school.
- **Develop an action plan**
Spend time as a group identifying goals, thinking about how you can achieve them and sharing tasks. This way everybody gets involved, everyone knows what they're working towards, and no one person has all the work to do. 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.

- **Adopt a constitution**
To set yourselves up as a group you really need to have a set of rules that will describe 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. The Charity Commission has a model constitution (see further information). A constitution should reflect what you want to do now and how you want to do it. It should also allow room for future development.
- **Start 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 or Steering Group. Whatever it is called, the Committee is elected by the membership. Some members of the Committee also take on specific roles within the Committee including Chair, Treasurer, and Secretary.
- **Hold your first General Meeting**
A General Meeting, or a meeting of all of the members of your new group, is usually the overall decision making body for the organisation. The General Meeting will be the ultimate body, to which the Management Committee are accountable, and the place where elections are held. At the first of these meetings (which should afterwards be held annually) you need to vote to agree your constitution and to elect a new Management Committee.
- **Open a Bank Account**
Once you have a set of rules you will need to open a bank account to keep any money that the group may raise. The account should be opened in the name of the group (not in the names of any of the members or their businesses, etc.). At least two people's signatures should be necessary in order to spend any money from the account; this means having two signatories. The two people who sign the cheques cannot be related. It is usually a good idea to have at least three or four people who can sign cheques so that there is always someone available if one or more of the signatories is unavailable.

Further information:

Other groups

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

The Charity Commission has useful information on starting up a charity.

www.charity-commission.gov.uk/Start_up_a_charity
or contact the Charity Commission on 0845 300 0218.

Have you seen our other useful fact sheets?

- Fact sheet 2: Management Committee Roles and Responsibilities
- Fact sheet 3: Planning and Holding Meetings
- Fact sheet 4: Legal Structures
- Fact sheet 5: Constitution
- Fact sheet 6: Business Planning

- Fact sheet 7: Are you fit for funding?
- Fact sheet 8: Charities and VAT

For further information and advice contact the CVS Development Team:

Call 01768 800350 or email: info@cumbriacvs.org.uk

Or visit the Cumbria CVS website www.cumbriacvs.org.uk

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