

How to set up a voluntary group

Quick reference sheet

What is a voluntary or community group?

A voluntary or community organisation aims to achieve specific aims within the community, usually to help a particular group of people or a cause. With the right planning and support, you can go a long way to making a difference in your local community.

Most types of community group are known in legal terms as an unincorporated association. Unincorporated associations do not need to be registered, nor are they regulated.

The five steps below will help you to understand the process of forming a voluntary group, and will give you some questions to consider. If you have any queries following this information, please contact SAVS for support.

Step 1: So what is it that you want to do?

You need to have a good idea of exactly what you intend to do. Here are some questions to consider:

- Will your group offer a service to a community or will it solely benefit its members?
- What are the aims of the group?
- What do you want to achieve?
- What geographical areas are you going to cover?

In order to move onto the next step, you will also need to have at least two other people who are committed to your group, who will form your committee.



Step 2: Who will you work 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. You should also think about what area you will cover - for example, will you only cover a specific local neighbourhood or a whole town or city?

Be realistic with your capacity and where you can make the most impact. Don't overstretch yourself.



Step 3: Does your project idea already exist?

Once you have put some consideration on how it might work, you need to research and find out if there are any existing groups that already do similar work in your given area. It is much harder to find support and funding if you are duplicating what other groups are doing, so make sure that your big idea is 'new or unique' in some way before you start. If there are already groups doing the same work, perhaps you could get involved with them?



Step 4: Collaborate with others

If you have a new idea and are ready to go, can you work with other organisations to create something new or benefit from their experience? If you are in a similar geographical area, then you could perhaps share premises and work together for the benefit of both groups.



Step 5: Structure and documentation

An unincorporated association is a group of individuals coming together to achieve specific aims within the community. At this point your organisation has no separate legal identity but you will need:

A set of rules or a constitution – SAVS offers model constitutions for you to adapt
A management committee - to make decisions, manage finances and decide on the direction of the organisation

A shared purpose or activity – usually to help a particular group of people or cause
If applying for funding then dependant of the funders' requirements other documentation such as 'equal opportunities policy' or public liability insurance may be required.

As an unincorporated association, you have a greater level of privacy because you do not have to disclose who your members are, how you operate, or how you keep your finances. However, because you have no separate legal entity, members are personally liable for the organisations debts or other claims.

As your community group grows and develops, you may consider registering as a charity. If you are to employ paid staff, own land or premises, or have an income of over £5,000 then you must register as a charity with the Charity Commission. There are various legal charitable structures; you will need to select the structure which is right for you. The Charity Commission website has a wealth of information on this subject; you can go to <http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk/>.

If you would like to progress with this, SAVS has a further guide called 'How to set up a voluntary group', which gives further details and information into the process. To receive a copy, please contact Susannah on funding@savs-southend.co.uk or phone 01702 356008.

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