

*You may find it useful to follow the RouteMap on our website, as a way in to thinking about the type of group you want to set up.*

# Getting a group started

## Why form a group?

There are many different reasons why you may want to set up a group – for example:

- H There may be a proposed development in your neighbourhood which many people feel strongly about
- H You may have had a good idea and need some more people to help make it happen
- H You may want to meet up with other people who have had similar experiences to yours, so that you can offer each other friendship, support and advice
- H You may want to give an existing group a recognised structure in order to attract funding

## What's the first step?

Just as there are many different reasons to form a group, there are many different types of group you could set up. It's worth thinking about what kind of group you imagine it will be, as this may affect the order you do things in.

For example, if you are planning to set up a charitable trust to run arts projects in the community, you will want to give some thought to the aims and structure of the group before you invite others to join you, so that you can be clear about what you are asking them to do.

On the other hand, if you need to respond quickly to a proposal from the council that will affect your area, the first thing you'll need to do is get as many people as possible together, so that they can all contribute their ideas and energy.

Though you may do these things in a different order depending on the type of group you are setting up, most new groups will need to:

- H Hold an initial meeting
- H Agree the aims of the group



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- H Write a constitution
- H Open a bank account
- H Decide who will do what

Each of these things involves several decisions and activities – here are some ideas and tips to get you started.

## Hold an initial meeting

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Here are a few ideas for making your first meeting attractive and interesting:

### Publicise it well

The design of your publicity material is important. You need to think about who you are hoping to attract to the meeting, and make sure your poster or leaflet will catch their eye and give them a reason to come along to your meeting. Make sure the date, time and place of the meeting are clearly shown on the leaflet, and that it's very clear what the meeting is about.

If your meeting is going to be a large one, with as many people involved as possible, you will need to do as much publicity as you can. You could use:

- H flyers through letterboxes
- H posters in shop windows or on community noticeboards
- H leaflets in places where the people you want to reach are likely to go
- H a letter or advert in a community newsletter
- H a piece in the local paper
- H an announcement on the local radio

If your group is going to be quite small, for example a residents' association for a single block of flats or street, it is worth investing the time to call on people to invite them to the meeting personally. Even if they don't come, this will give you useful information about whether they think the group is a good idea and what they want it to do.

### Offer an incentive

Not many people enjoy meetings, and for some it is a big effort to arrange childcare or transport, so it's a good idea to offer an extra attraction. This could simply be free refreshments, or perhaps a video or speaker about something to do with the group's aims or activity.

### Think about the venue and facilities

Is it accessible to everyone? Are there steps or other barriers you should warn people about on the publicity leaflet? Will you need to

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*You can design and print your publicity at the Resource Centre. We have an information sheet on writing a News release and some useful addresses for local media contacts. We also have some good books on publicity in our reference library.*

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*We have an information sheet about preparing agendas for meetings in general, which you may find useful.*

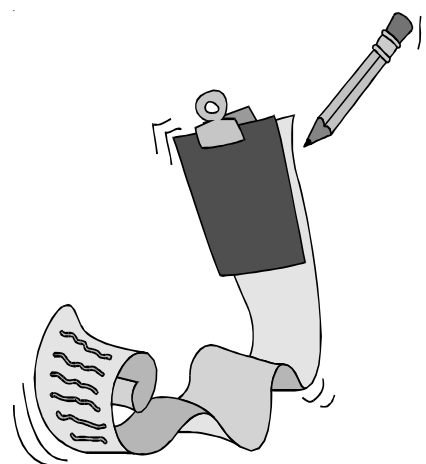
put up signs to direct people as they arrive? Would it make things easier if you had a PA system or induction loop? Will you need to organise a crèche or offer help with childcare costs? Might you need a sign language interpreter? If you have a speaker, will they need a data projector?

## Think about the agenda

The amount of preparation you need to do before the meeting will depend on the type of group it is, but it's always good to have some idea of what needs to be covered in the meeting.

A typical agenda for an initial meeting would include:

- H Welcome and introductions
- H Aims of the group
- H Name of the group
- H Plans and ideas  
(and who will carry them out)
- H Who will do what  
(responsibilities in general)
- H Finances
- H Date and time of the next meeting



If you have called the meeting, people will be expecting you to act as chair. If it's going to be a large meeting and you are not confident in this role, it may be worth asking someone else to chair the meeting – perhaps a local councillor, teacher, religious leader or well-known community figure. But be careful that your choice of chair is not going to cause controversy in the meeting.

## Involve everyone in the discussion

While it's important to appear well-organised, you also want to let people know that their contribution is needed and valuable, so make sure you don't close off discussion too quickly. The people who have come along to the meeting are the future members of the group, and you need to make sure the atmosphere of this meeting is as welcoming and open as possible.

## Take minutes

The minutes of your meeting don't have to be very detailed, but they should include a clear note of any decisions made at the meeting, and in particular who has agreed to take on which jobs. It's not easy to chair a meeting and take minutes at the same time, so ask for a volunteer to take notes at the start of the meeting.

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*We produce an information sheet on Charing meetings, which includes some useful tips.*

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*We have an information sheet on Taking Minutes, with some useful pointers.*

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### Gather names and addresses

Make sure you take contact details from everyone who wants to be kept in touch with the group – prepare a sheet in advance which you can pass round the meeting or have on a table at the door.

### Set a date for the next meeting

It's worth allowing some time in the meeting, so that you can discuss how often you want the group to meet, whether daytime or evening meetings are best suited to the members of your group, whether you need to offer childcare or transport to enable people to attend meetings, and so on.

It's not always possible to agree a meeting date that everyone can make, but it's important to make sure you aren't always excluding the same people just because you haven't thought about their needs.

### Agree the aims of the group

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It's a good idea to talk about the aims of the group at this first meeting, so that everyone is clear from the start about what the group is for. Make sure someone writes down what the meeting has agreed and check that everyone is happy with the wording.

### Write a constitution

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You may want to include your aims in a written constitution, and it's worth inviting a few people to volunteer to work on this and bring a draft back to the group.

If you are going to apply for grant funding, you will probably need a written constitution, to show funders that you are an organised group. Unless you are going to be a registered charity or a limited company, there are no legal rules about what your constitution should say.

Once you have written and agreed the constitution, however, it becomes the 'governing document' of your group, and it should set out clearly how you intend to run your group. A good constitution can help to resolve disputes and enable new members to participate fully in the running of the group.

### Open a bank account

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Running any group costs money, and it's a good idea to start thinking at the beginning about where to get it from and how to look after it. As soon as your group has some money, you will want to give one person responsibility for keeping track of it (the Treasurer).

Having a group bank account is the best way to make sure the group's money is kept safely. Most high street banks offer special accounts for community groups. You will need to have at least two members of

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*The Resource Centre has an information sheet on Writing a Constitution, which takes you through the process step by step and includes example clauses and headings you may wish to include.*

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*The Resource Centre has an information sheet on 'The role of the Treasurer'. We also have an online comparison table and information on banks that provide accounts for community groups*

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the group willing to act as signatories. Funders usually require (and it's a sensible precaution in any case) that you have a bank account where each cheque has to be signed by two people.

## Decide who will do what

You may want to elect a committee with named officers (Chair, Secretary, etc), or just share out the work that needs doing immediately. Either way, everyone needs to know who is doing what, and when they will report back to the whole group.

### How formal?

There is no right or wrong way to run a group – how formal your group will be depends on the wishes of the people involved and the aims and function of the group. Many groups change their structure as they develop, so there's no need to get bogged down in legal documents before you've even got off the ground.

On the other hand, it's worth giving the structure of your group some thought every now and then, to make sure you still have a set up that meets the needs of your group.



The Resource Centre has several information sheets in this area which different groups may find useful:

- \* The Secretary's role
- \* Chairing meetings
- \* Responsibilities of the Management Committee
- \* Community and voluntary groups – finding a legal structure to suit your group
- \* Not for Profit organisations – a guide to legal structures
- \* Charity registration
- \* Equal opportunities policy

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## What next?

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Each group has its own strengths and weaknesses, but there are several common issues most community groups need to deal with as they carry out their activities. Here are some useful pointers to information and resources that might help:

### Raising money

We publish information sheets on:

- \* Raising Money
- \* Fundraising from local businesses
- \* Fundraising applications
- \* Monitoring and Evaluation

And we produce our own factsheets on some key Favourite Funders for small groups in Brighton & Hove.

We also have a subscription to [www.trustfunding.org.uk](http://www.trustfunding.org.uk), an online database of grant-making trusts. All groups are welcome to use this at the Resource Centre. For further online fundraising resources, you could check out the 'Links to useful fundraising websites' on our website at [www.resourcecentre.org.uk](http://www.resourcecentre.org.uk)

### Finding a place to meet

Community Base maintain Venue Search, an online database of halls and rooms for hire in Brighton and Hove.

### Publicity and communications

The Resource Centre has equipment for community groups to use to design, photocopy or print your leaflets, newsletters, letters and posters.

We also have a fax machine and computers you can use if you have no office facilities of your own.

We publish the following information sheets to help you get your message across effectively:

- \* News release
- \* Media contacts
- \* Radio interviews
- \* State your case

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*You can search the database at  
[www.communitybase.org/  
venuesearch](http://www.communitybase.org/venuesearch)*

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*The Community and Voluntary  
Sector Forum maintains a  
directory of community  
newsletters published in  
Brighton & Hove. This may be  
useful if you want to publicise  
your new group in a particular  
area, or let others know about  
your own newsletter. See  
[www.cvsectorforum.org.uk/  
newsletters](http://www.cvsectorforum.org.uk/newsletters)*

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## Organising events

The Resource Centre has an enormous range of equipment for hire to help community groups organise successful events.

We also maintain Beachcomber, an online database of useful resources for groups in Sussex, so if we don't have the equipment you need, we may well know where you can find it. You can search Beachcomber yourself on our website, or contact us and we will search for you.

We publish some useful information sheets for groups organising events:

- \* Event Planning Checklist
- \* Licensing and Regulations
- \* Running a Creche

And we have a page of 'Links for Useful websites for event organisers'.

## Involving volunteers

Brighton and Hove Volunteer Bureau have a useful Good Practice Guide to working with volunteers, which includes tips on involving people as well as sample policies and forms. The Guide is available on the Volunteer Bureau website at [www.bh-impetus.org/volunteeringgoodpractice](http://www.bh-impetus.org/volunteeringgoodpractice), or in CD form in the Resource Centre reference library.

You can advertise for volunteers at Brighton and Hove Volunteer Bureau and Community Base Volunteer Search.

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*Brighton and Hove  
Volunteer Bureau  
1st Floor, Intergen House,  
65-67 Western Road,  
Hove, BN3 2JQ  
Tel: 01273 737888  
[www.bh-impetus.org/  
volunteer\\_centre/](http://www.bh-impetus.org/volunteer_centre/)*

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