

How to start and maintain a community group

If you're thinking about starting up a new group or organisation in your community this guide will help you to think about what you need to do. You might find that only some of what is in this list applies to your group but it is useful to consider them all before you proceed.

Is this the right group for your community?

How do you know whether there is a need for this group?

What evidence do you have (survey, recent closure of similar group which was well attended, community interest). Is there already a group like yours? Avoid duplication and consider joining up with another group if appropriate.

Consider times, days, location, costs or charges.

What do you aim to achieve and what impact do you want to make? This can be the mission statement for your constitution or set of rules for your group.

What is the purpose of your group and what steps does the group need to take to help achieve this? On a standard constitution or set of rules this is often referred to as your aim and objectives.

You and who else?

Establish a core group of volunteers to support the development and running of the group. You can use the local volunteer recruitment website to advertise for roles.

Meet to identify the strengths, skills and experience of the group and allocate roles appropriately.

Delegate roles and responsibilities to avoid overload on one person, this will help to develop ownership of the group.

Have fun sharing ideas and plans.

Find the right community venue - aspects to consider:

- Heating
- Toilets
- baby change

- kitchen
- storage space and buggy storage,
- good access for people with varying abilities
- car parking
- public transport links
- room capacity
- safety.

You may be able to negotiate an initial lower rent whilst the group becomes established.

Costs – decide how much you will charge (room hire will need to be covered along with restocking materials and purchasing snacks if needed). Charging attendees small amount from the beginning will help to make sure the group continues.

You may wish to carry out fundraising activities to cover initial set up costs.

Keeping safe

There should be a [risk assessment](#) for the building you will be using, make yourself familiar with this to ensure you and group members are aware of the fire escape procedure, first aid resources and potential hazards. Follow the guidance given to reduce the risk of harm to members of your group. It is good practice to risk assess your sessions based on the activities you will be providing, consider the risks involved and measures you can put in place to reduce these.

Before each session check the room to make sure that it is clear of harmful objects, if appropriate make sure all sockets have safety covers, that fires or heaters are behind guards and safety gates are in place. Use posters to promote safety at the group.

All attendees should be aware of the fire evacuation procedures with one person nominated to be a fire steward who would make sure all procedures are followed should a fire evacuation be necessary. It is good practice to have a qualified first aider in attendance at each session, a fully stocked first aid box is essential. Any accident during the session will need to be recorded in an accident book. There needs to be a record of time and type of injury, name of person, first aid given and if a trip to the doctor or hospital was recommended. It needs to be signed by the individual themselves or the parent/carer to show that they are happy with what is recorded.

Having an [attendance register](#) of who attends each session will enable you to make sure everyone is accounted for if there is an evacuation or emergency, it will also give you an idea of group numbers each week.

If you take photographs during the session you will need permission from the person you are taking the photograph of (parental permission for children under 16 years). This can be done through a

photo consent form from parents/ carers/individuals and clear agreement on how the photographs will be used.

It is a good idea for all members of the group to complete a [simple registration form](#). This could include details such as:

- name
- child's name (if appropriate)
- child's date of birth (if appropriate)
- address
- contact telephone number
- emergency contact number/ next of kin contact number
- medical conditions (including allergies)
- specific needs
- signature of parent/carer/attendee
- date of joining.
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If you are taking a group of young people on a trip or activity then you will need to consider a [parental consent form](#).

All forms could include a data protection declaration and a photo consent option. It should state how the information supplied will be stored/used and who will have access to it. The person completing the form must give written consent for the information to be used in the ways stated. Keeping contact details up to date will ensure you can keep in touch with those who attend and let everyone know if you make changes or decide to offer additional sessions. All information you hold should be kept securely.

Must dos

If your group will involve supporting children and vulnerable adults you will need facilitators who have been DBS screened through the Enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service. You may be able to receive support to do this from the Community Participation team.

If your group supports children or vulnerable adults your safeguarding procedures for protecting children, young people and vulnerable adults need to be clear to all. Your group must also have a current child protection and/or vulnerable adult policy in place. The policy needs to be reviewed on an annual basis. Having the policy in place supports the safety and protection of both volunteers, children and vulnerable adults. A copy of the policies should be made available or displayed clearly whilst the group is in session and all members should be made aware of it. Safeguarding training and advice about policies and procedures is available through the Community Participation team.

You will need to ensure you have appropriate insurance in place. Have a discussion with the venue providers as this may be covered by the policy for the building or you may need to purchase this specifically for your group's needs.

You need to ensure that your group is operating in a fair and none-discriminatory way so it's advisable to put in place a clear policy that outlines your group's statement regarding equality and diversity.

Check that any new activities introduced in your group are covered by your insurance. You might find that certain activities are required to be delivered by a qualified person; e.g. if providing sporting/physical activities, serving hot food etc.

Planning your sessions

The key to creating a successful group is to be inclusive and make everyone feel welcome. Many people who feel isolated in their communities will welcome the support and friendship that your group can offer.

Consider the layout of the room e.g. what will allow everyone to communicate easily for example for a parent and toddler group you may need to create specific zones e.g. baby area, large play equipment, messy play, puzzles. Consider asking group members to help with tidying up at the end of a session.

A welcome pack containing the terms and conditions of your group could be useful as it will enable you to set out clear guidelines, for example you may wish to set out how members of the group are expected to treat each other, in line with your Equalities and Diversity policy.

Try to have structure to your sessions which are planned in advance. You can use this standard template.

You may wish to invite outside organisations to talk to your group and share information.

Most groups offer some kind of refreshments (ensure all hot drinks are made and drunk away from young children).

The most important thing that you and your group need to remember is to have fun.

Roles and responsibilities

Your group will need a set of rules or Governing Document so that everyone knows: What your group is called, what it aims to do, how your group will be run and who is responsible for the running. The normal governing document for a small group is called a constitution and is often needed to apply for grants and funding. Once your group has agreed and signed your constitution, it is a legal document. The committee, not the group members, will be personally responsible for making sure the rules are followed.

Committee run groups are usually groups run by the community for the community. The members will form a committee that meets on a regular basis. Committees will often have a number of elected people on them such as a chairperson, secretary, treasurer and committee members. It is a good way to share the workload and can make the decision making process easier.

You will need to agree as a group how often the committee will meet to discuss how the group is running and where improvements can be made. You might wish to consider holding an Annual General Meeting (AGM) so that the membership of the committee can be reviewed if needed.

As your group develops you may decide to adapt your group into some sort of charitable structure. There are different structures you can choose and your committee members and group participants

will need to agree which one is right for you. There is lots of information available that will help you decide what is right for your group.

Managing money and ongoing funding

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 need to identify one person who will take responsibility for keeping track of it (the treasurer). However, it's important to remember that all your committee members hold overall responsibility of your group's money.

Having a 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 the group willing to act as signatories. Funders usually require that you have a bank account where each cheque has to be signed by two people.

You might want to consider applying for external grants and funding for your group. Find out about current information on the different sorts of monies available and how to apply.

Keeping your group going

Ensure your group is well publicised through methods which best suit the people who are likely to attend. Consider posters, social media, advertisements, word of mouth etc. A guide is available to help you. You can also register on the Mylife website to advertise your group or club to the wider Telford and Wrekin community.

Organising fundraising events will enable you to tell the community about your group and what you offer along with raising funds.

Volunteers will be more likely to stay if you can offer relevant training and ongoing support. There may be a course that they can access for free.

You may wish to create an online group (e.g. on Facebook) to help coordinate activities/events and send out automatic reminders.

Ensure your group organisers/committee meet on a regular basis to oversee, plan, evaluate and review all the activities of the group. It's important to record decisions made at these meetings as well as noting the names of people who have agreed to carry out any actions.

It's important to remember that people involved in groups do come and go. Having new people get involved brings in new ideas and different ways of doing things. Meeting on a regular basis will ensure that new ideas and suggestions can be discussed and the development and smooth running of the group will continue.