

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. It might be worth having a conversation with the Community Support Team as they are in contact with many different groups.

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. [Visit the Volunteer Telford website for local volunteering opportunities.](#) [View information and advice available to support you to recruit volunteers.](#)

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 ([download a list of community venues in the borough](#)) - aspects to consider:

- Heating
- Toilets
- Baby change
- Kitchen
- storage space
- buggy storage
- good access for people with varying abilities
- car parking
- public transport links
- room capacity and safety.

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

Costs – Decide how much you will charge for people to use your group (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- this could also be a good way of promoting your group to the community

Keeping safe

There should be a risk assessment for the building you will be using ([download a risk assessment template](#)), 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, and 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. [Download an attendance register template](#).

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 16yrs). This can be done through a photo consent form from parents/carers/individuals and clear agreement on how the photographs will be used. Further guidance can be found on the [Visit the NSPCC website for more information on sharing images](#).

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

- Name
- Childs 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

[Download a simple registration form template](#).

All forms should 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. You will need to take into account the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) coming into place on 25 May 2018.

Visit the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) website to access advice on GDPR for small organisations.

Safeguarding

If your group involves supporting children, young people and/or vulnerable adults you will need facilitators who have had an enhanced DBS check through the [Disclosure and Barring Service](#). You may be able to receive support to do this from the Community Support Team. Training is also available for all trustees, staff and volunteers who work with or have responsibility for children and young people, through the [Telford & Wrekin Safeguarding Partnership](#).

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. Support from the Community Support Team can be requested to enable you to put these in place by contacting cpt@telford.gov.uk.

The policy needs to be reviewed on an annual basis. Having the policy in place supports the safety and protection of 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. Further advice about safeguarding training and policies and procedures is available from the Community Support Team.

The NSPCC has published information on safer activities and events that is aimed at the voluntary and community sector but the principles of best practice may be helpful to those in other sectors. Best practice includes: follow safer recruitment procedures to make sure everyone who works or volunteers at the event or activity is suitable to do so; draw up a code of conduct for all the adults who are working or volunteering at the event or activity; nominate a key member of staff or volunteer to take overall responsibility for organising the event or activity; and make sure all staff and volunteers understand the safeguarding and child protection plan. [Visit the NSPCC website for guidance on safer activities and events](#).

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. 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.

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. Think about the access needs your group may have, do your participants need specialist equipment such as a hearing loop?

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. [Learn about how the Equality Act applies to voluntary organisations](#).

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) there may be a community café on site which could cater for your group?

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 Documents 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 type of Governing Document that is required will depend on which type of organisation you are and the legal structure that your organisation has chosen.

Most small groups and voluntary organisations are unincorporated organisations and so their Governing Document is called a constitution. It is often needed to open a bank account for your group and apply for grants and funding. Once your group has agreed and signed your constitution, it is a legal document. [A model constitution for unincorporated associations is available from the Charity Commission.](#)

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.

If you need support on recruiting Trustees view Getting on Board's [free guide](#).

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. UK Finance have a 'Voluntary Organisation Banking Guide' which is a useful tool to guide you through setting up a bank account, alongside helping you find the best account for your needs. [View the UK Finance Voluntary Organisation Banking Guide.](#)

It's likely that your group will incur regular costs, so you'll want to think about how you'll meet these costs. There's lots of ways your group can raise funds, from fundraising activities, charging your attendees subs to applying for grant funding. [View our page on funding and grants for community groups](#) to find out more.

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 on Understanding Digital Communications, Campaigns and Content is available to help.](#)

You can also register on the [Live Well Telford](#) to advertise your group or club to the wider Telford and Wrekin community for free.

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.