

Getting Started Guide

Getting Started

Most groups are started in response to an identified need. The best way to get going is to bring together a small number of people who share your interest and talk about the problem you want to address and what you could do about it. Even if these people are not able to commit long-term they may be willing to contribute ideas and experience in the early stages.



To find interested people, if you don't already know them, you could ask community workers, school teachers and others who meet a lot of people in the community. You could put up notices in post offices, supermarkets, libraries, community centres, places of worship, GP surgeries and anywhere else people gather. It is helpful to consider the skills, experience and qualities your group might need.

If you want to reach a wider audience, try contacting local papers or radio outlining what you propose and giving your contact details. This might be free of charge. Community Southwark may be able to give you useful contacts or publicity in our newsletter or website.

Filling a Gap

There are around 180,000 registered charities in England and Wales, and perhaps as many again smaller unregistered ones. In Southwark alone there are 1,222 registered charities and many more organisations of different legal forms (2014/15).

There are an estimated 110,000 sports clubs in the United Kingdom involved in over 100 sports (in 2011).

There are currently 4264 registered Charitable Incorporated Organisation's (CIO's) in England and Wales (in June 2015).

There are a total of 10,639 CIC's on public record. 9594 of these are registered in England; 1636 registered in London alone (2014-15)

It is worth finding out about those with similar interests to yours and getting in touch with them before you start. If you find other people already doing what you want to do, it might make more sense to link up with them rather than starting a new organisation and competing for the same service users or funding. If you can see that there is a need for the services you want to offer and no one is doing what you want to do then you are in a strong position with funders.

Funders will also want to know how you are working in partnership with other groups in your area. A network of contacts in similar organisations can be an invaluable source of shared resources, advice and support.

Funding and Finances

Even at this early stage, you may need money to pay for meeting rooms, publicity, telephone or postage. If you cannot meet these costs yourselves, or through donations from interested people or organisations, you will need to find out about possible sources of funding.

The internet is the most up to date source of funding information. If you don't have internet access you can go to a public library to access computers or look at printed directories of funders. Community Southwark can also help you access information about grants, which may come from local or national government or lottery money or from charitable trusts.

Funders require a group to open a business bank account with at least two signatories. Most banks offer accounts for small businesses and some have specialised voluntary sector accounts. Find out from the bank what you need before you go to see them to open an account. Funders also expect you to have financial systems in place to record your income and outgoings. You can go to the Local Accountancy Project (020 7708 5999) for help with this. Community Accountancy Self Help (CASH) has resources on their website: www.cash-online.org.uk.

The Management Committee

The group needs to identify a committee to run it. The minimum number of people is three – a chairperson, a secretary and a treasurer. It is also helpful to have a vice chairperson for when the chairperson is unavailable. There is no maximum number for a committee but you should keep it manageable – between five and ten is a rough guide. People will have the best experience of being part of your management committee if you make good use of their skills and personal qualities and agree with them at the beginning what their responsibilities are going to be.

Community Southwark can provide information, training and advice on the roles of the committee members and how to manage meetings. Or have a look at the website Governance Pages at www.governancepages.org.uk.

The Constitution

Banks usually require a group to have a constitution to open a business bank account, and funders will need to see this too. A constitution outlines your aims and describes the rules for running your group. It is a legal document and it needs to be appropriate to how you want to operate. It is best to get advice from Community Southwark about this. Do not download ready-made constitutions from the internet or pay private companies or lawyers to write them for you – these will cost unnecessary money and may be completely wrong for you.

Although you cannot actually register as a charity until you have £5000 in the bank, the Charity Commission's model constitution for a charitable association is usually the best one for small groups with charitable aims to use. You can get it from their website and follow the guidance notes to amend it to suit your group. Make sure you get advice from your CVS or from the Charity Commission helpline if you are in doubt, and get the constitution checked before your management committee agrees it. To agree it they should all sign it at a meeting and keep a copy. Minutes of the meeting should be taken saying that the constitution was agreed.

A First Meeting

It is usually a good idea to have an open meeting to launch the new organisation. If you want the group to attract people from all sections of the community, invite representatives from different groups to contribute their ideas at the first meeting, rather than waiting until the group has become established. As well as the people already involved, think about inviting anyone else you know who may be interested in helping, other organisations working in a similar field, organisations working with specific groups or communities, councillors and/or local authority staff.

It is important to consider ways in which the meeting can be made inclusive and accessible: time of day, crèche facilities, disabled access etc.

The meeting could be formal or informal. Either way, it is a chance to explain what you have in mind, make contacts, seek publicity, attract volunteers and find out how your proposals look to others. Keep notes of the points that people make at the meeting.

Finding Volunteers

You may not need the help of volunteers at this stage, or you may find enough through your own contacts. However, if you do use volunteers to carry out the work or to form your management committee, it is important to have role descriptions, pay reasonable expenses if possible and treat them well. You can get more support around managing volunteers and recruiting volunteers at [Community Southwark's Volunteering team](#)

Making a Plan

Once your group is going, it is time to draw up a simple working plan. This will tell your members, supporters and other interested people what you are doing, why and how you will go about it. You will need a plan if you apply for a grant.

Your plan should explain:

- The change you want to make – aims, the overall impact you want to see
- What your group intends to do – objectives, what outcomes would you like to achieve?
- How you are going to do it – what activities will you carry out to meet these outcomes?
- The resources it has available (people's time and support, any special skills, money, equipment, use of premises etc.)
- Any further resources it needs, and how it hopes to find them (e.g. by finding volunteers or raising money)
- How soon it hopes to do things – timetable

Drawing up a plan will help you to decide on priorities. For example, it might show that you have the resources to start one activity, but not another, or that you need more money before you can recruit more volunteers.

The plan will also mean that you can measure your achievements because you will be able to compare it later with what the organisation has done. It doesn't have to be a big document – spending time on the planning so your ideas are clear is more important than writing lots of text.

Summary: What you need to get started

- Management committee
- Business bank account
- Constitution
- A plan for future activities
- Funding (or money to run on until you get it)

Resources

- London Voluntary Service Council (LVSC): www.lvsc.org.uk, General number 020 7700 8107, Advice Line 020 7700 8225
- National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA): www.navca.org.uk, 0114 278 6636
- National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO): www.ncvo-vol.org.uk, 0800 2 798 798
- Charity Commission: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/charity-commission> , 0845 3000 218
- Volresource (web-based resources): www.volresource.org.uk

- Forbes ['7 Steps for Starting a Social Enterprise'](#) Posted January 2013
- Caroline Deihl ['Ten steps to starting your own charity'](#) Guardian Careers; Published August 2013

Support

If you would like any support with starting up and picking a legal structure or any other issues facing your organisation, please contact the Development Team at Community Southwark: development@communitysouthwark.org or 020 7358 7020