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# How to start up A new 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 in any way. This factsheet outlines a few practicalities to consider when setting up your new voluntary and community group.

## Step 1: What do 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 gathered **at least two other people** who are committed to your group.

## 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. If you are going to work with several groups, then you need to think carefully about any possible conflicts of interest. 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 resources and where you can make the most impact. Don't try and overstretch yourself.

### Step 3: Are you overlapping with other groups?

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 do similar kinds of 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 and connections? If you are in a similar geographical area, then you could perhaps share premises and work together for the benefit of both groups.

#### Key words:

**Unincorporated association** - A group of individuals coming together to achieve specific aims within the community. At this point your organisation has no separate legal identity

### Step 5: Structure and documentation

An unincorporated association usually has:

- **A set of rules or a constitution** – though it does not require legal support to prepare this
- **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 a cause

As your community group grows and develops, you may consider registering as a charity. To register as a charity you can consider various legal structures and will need to select the form that is appropriate for you.

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 organisation's debts or other claims. If you are to employ paid staff, own land or premise, or deal with finances of over £5,000 then you must register as a charity with the **Charity Commission**.

### Step 6: Advice and support

Working in partnership, sharing information and networking with other groups that are doing similar things in your local area, can be an invaluable source of support. However there is support available at your local CVS through the Group Development Worker.