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Guide to setting up a short-lived crisis response group

Starting a community group from scratch can be a daunting prospect. This guide has been put together to help you start and run a successful group, in response to a short-lived crisis, that will make a real difference to the community. ¹

Why set up a Community Group?

There are many reasons for setting up a community group:

There is a need – Local people have identified a need for a particular activity or service that is lacking in their area.

To get something done – There may be an identified need but crucially it needs time and commitment from people, like yourselves, who are willing to get on and do something about it.

To work with other people – Running a group is a team effort. It isn't just about the work to do, but also about shared responsibility. Starting a group means working together with people who share similar concerns and are aiming to solve a particular problem or meet a certain need.

Help a community access funds – To improve the local area with projects focusing on the environment, sports, art, health, or leisure activities.

¹ Information and copy used in this guide has been with the permission of www.resourcecentre.org.uk



Considerations when setting up a Community Group

Setting up a new group involves a variety of tasks and there are several things that you need to consider before setting up. Forethought and good planning at these initial stages will save time and effort later.

Below are several questions you should ask yourselves about your group:

What type of organisation is it?

- Will it be a self-help group?
- Will it provide services and/or activities for others?
- Will it undertake campaigning work on issues of concern?
- Where will it operate?

Is there a need for the service?

- How do you know there is a need?
- Who needs it?
- How many people need it?
- What are the needs?
- Will your group meet these needs in full / in part?
- How will you involve those who need the service in the shaping of your work?

What are your organisations aims?

- What do you want to achieve?
- What kind of activities will you provide to achieve this?
- How will you know that you have been successful?



For each of the proposed activities you need to consider the following:

- Who will run the activity? Do you have volunteers, or will you need to pay staff? Is training required?
- What skills or experience do you have within the group to run the activity?
- Will you need premises e.g., hire of the local community building?
- How will you advertise your services and publicise your group to reach those that need it the most?
- Where will funds be sought and who will do the fundraising? You will need to be as specific as possible about costs.

Are there organisations that already offer what I intend to provide?

Find out what else is going on in your area: look for your parish and town councils, Resident's Associations, Good Neighbours Schemes, Street Associations, local faith organisations, Food Banks, Facebook, or other social media groups. You could research this on the internet, at your local library or local authority.

There is a [directory of organisations providing support](https://directory.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/) (<https://directory.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/>) maintained by Buckinghamshire Council.

If they exist, join the group.

Duplicating can be expensive, a waste of resources, creates ill-feeling with those you compete with and deters funders. Joining an existing organisation and working with them saves a lot of hard work setting yourselves up and getting everything off the ground.

If there are groups already doing something similar you might work together to develop something new or set up a group in your area, if they do not already reach there. You might share resources, premises and expertise.

Top Tip

If you think a new group is necessary, be clear about:

- What the advantages would be in setting up a new organisation
- What would be different about your group?



Other considerations:

- Do we have the time, energy, and commitment to do the work ourselves?
- Do we have a plan of action?
- Do we need policies and procedures?
- Do we need a constitution?
- Do we need a committee?
- When will we hold general meetings?
- How will we hold general meetings?
- Do we need a bank account?
- Does our work involve young people or vulnerable people?
- How will we generate funds?
- Have we considered legal responsibilities towards the people we will work with or provide services for?

What makes a successful group?

- Meeting a clear need
- Being realistic about what you want to do and can achieve
- It is a team effort - work with new and existing communities members
- Securing resources to help you achieve your aims (e.g., people and funding)
- Understanding legal and other responsibilities
- Knowing where to access support when you need it

I want to set up a new organisation. What do I need to do?

If you are setting up a group in response to a crisis, you will be wanting to act quickly. You may not have had time to open a bank account in your group's name, and you may not have thought about producing any written guidelines at all for your group. However, it is sensible to put some basic guidelines in place to protect your volunteers and your funds. It is a good idea to develop a:

Committee, Basic constitution and a system for managing money.

You may also be able to apply for external funding if you have these things in place.



Committee

To run your group, you will need committee members with varied skill sets. You may want to elect a committee with named officers 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.

Initially, there are usually 3 to 4 people who set up a group before evolving into a management committee of between 3 to 11 people.

The Committee are responsible for:

- Setting the aims and objectives for the group
- Working towards the aims and objectives and acting in the best interest of the people the group is set up to support (beneficiaries)
- Ensuring that the group has enough resources to carry out its work and that those resources are well managed and used to meet its aims and objectives
- Holds regular committee meetings.

Further information about the roles and responsibilities of committee members can be found on the [Resource Centre website](https://www.resourcecentre.org.uk/information/responsibilities-of-the-management-committee/)

[\(https://www.resourcecentre.org.uk/information/responsibilities-of-the-management-committee/\)](https://www.resourcecentre.org.uk/information/responsibilities-of-the-management-committee/)

Basic constitution

A constitution is the rulebook by which your group is run. It will set out what the aims and objectives are of the organisation; how it is run; by whom; and other administration functions there within. It can be a very short and plain document.

You will also need this document to apply for money to run your group. Once your group has agreed and signed the constitution, it is a legal document.

We have produced a [sample constitution for small voluntary groups](https://communityimpactbucks.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/CIB-Sample-Constitution.pdf)

[\(https://communityimpactbucks.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/CIB-Sample-Constitution.pdf\)](https://communityimpactbucks.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/CIB-Sample-Constitution.pdf) which can be adapted for your use.



How will you manage your money?

What will you do with any money that is left at the end?

For example, you might decide to donate any remaining funds to a local community centre or food bank. It's a good idea to think about this in advance, so that your treasurer is not left having to decide on their own.

System for managing money

It is a good idea for your group to agree a simple system for how you will deal with money, and to write these agreements down. Your group's money guidelines should include details of banking, procedures for spending money, and record-keeping.

Bank accounts

It is not good practice for groups to manage their money through an individual's personal bank account. However, in the case of crisis response groups, there is a need to act quickly, and many groups may have started using personal bank accounts. If possible, it is better for groups to:

- Write a constitution and open a bank account in the name of the group.

For further information on opening a bank account please [visit our website \(https://communityimpactbucks.org.uk/charities-groups/running-your-organisation/key-resources-for-other-areas-of-your-business/#get-help-with-financial-management\)](https://communityimpactbucks.org.uk/charities-groups/running-your-organisation/key-resources-for-other-areas-of-your-business/#get-help-with-financial-management).

Until you have a group bank account, it is important to agree on some specific guidelines that you will follow. For example,

- Have a clear process for when and how group funds are transferred into and out of the bank account.



- Have a ‘treasurer’ who keeps records of all funds received by the group, the amounts transferred into personal accounts, and the amounts transferred out of personal accounts.
- If you are using an online fundraising tool, have at least two members of the group who are ‘administrators’ or owners.
- Make sure the group double checks that the treasurer’s records match the amounts that were recorded in the fundraising tool.

Procedures for spending money

Your group should agree some basic procedures for making decisions about money and approving payments. This should include a process for at least two people, who aren’t related and don’t live in the same household, to approve every payment. This is particularly important if your group is using an individual’s personal bank account. You can either use a paper form which is signed by two people, or an email which must be responded to by both people to give approval. Whichever you choose, the form or email should include:

- Date
- Exact amount of money
- What the money will be spent on
- Names of the two people approving the payment

Financial records

You will need to keep some clear financial records either in a book or in an electronic account system. It is a good idea to elect one person to act as ‘treasurer’ and take responsibility for keeping these records.

The Resource Centre have a [free accounts template](https://www.resourcecentre.org.uk/information/money-in-mind-accounts-systems/) (<https://www.resourcecentre.org.uk/information/money-in-mind-accounts-systems/>) and if you would like to know more about the role of the Treasurer, you can download a role description from the [NCVO website](https://knowhow.ncvo.org.uk/governance/governance-structure-and-roles/roles-on-the-board). (<https://knowhow.ncvo.org.uk/governance/governance-structure-and-roles/roles-on-the-board>)².

² Membership to NCVO is free for organisations with income less than £30,000 and on a sliding scale thereafter.



Useful links

- Community Impact Bucks – [Running your organisation](https://communityimpactbucks.org.uk/charities-groups/running-your-organisation/)
(<https://communityimpactbucks.org.uk/charities-groups/running-your-organisation/>)
- Community Impact Bucks – [Setting up your organisation](https://communityimpactbucks.org.uk/charities-groups/running-your-organisation/getting-started/)
(<https://communityimpactbucks.org.uk/charities-groups/running-your-organisation/getting-started/>)
- Community Impact Bucks – [Governing Documents](https://communityimpactbucks.org.uk/charities-groups/running-your-organisation/governing-documents/)
(<https://communityimpactbucks.org.uk/charities-groups/running-your-organisation/governing-documents/>)
- Community Impact Bucks – [Policies](https://communityimpactbucks.org.uk/charities-groups/running-your-organisation/policies/)
(<https://communityimpactbucks.org.uk/charities-groups/running-your-organisation/policies/>)
- Community Impact Bucks – [Planning & Strategy](https://communityimpactbucks.org.uk/charities-groups/running-your-organisation/planning-and-strategy/)
(<https://communityimpactbucks.org.uk/charities-groups/running-your-organisation/planning-and-strategy/>)
- Community Impact Bucks - [Funding](https://communityimpactbucks.org.uk/funding/)
(<https://communityimpactbucks.org.uk/funding/>)
- Community Impact Bucks – [We need Volunteers](https://communityimpactbucks.org.uk/volunteering/we-need-volunteers/)
(<https://communityimpactbucks.org.uk/volunteering/we-need-volunteers/>)
- Government Guidance - [Donate and volunteer to aid humanitarian disasters](https://www.gov.uk/donate-volunteer-humanitarian-disaster)
(<https://www.gov.uk/donate-volunteer-humanitarian-disaster>)
- Charity Commission - [Ukraine humanitarian crisis: guidance for charities and trustees](https://www.gov.uk/donate-volunteer-humanitarian-disaster)
(<https://www.gov.uk/donate-volunteer-humanitarian-disaster>)



- Fundraising Regulator - [Regulators urge safe giving to support Ukraine](https://www.fundraisingregulator.org.uk/more-from-us/news/regulators-urge-safe-giving-support-ukraine) (<https://www.fundraisingregulator.org.uk/more-from-us/news/regulators-urge-safe-giving-support-ukraine>)
- Fundraising Regulator – [Covid 19 Guidance](https://www.fundraisingregulator.org.uk/guidance/coronavirus) (<https://www.fundraisingregulator.org.uk/guidance/coronavirus>)
- Fundraising Regulator – [Setting up an Online Fundraising Appeal](https://www.fundraisingregulator.org.uk/guidance/coronavirus) (<https://www.fundraisingregulator.org.uk/guidance/coronavirus>)

Further support

If you are a charity, voluntary or community group or social enterprise, Community Impact Bucks can provide **tailored advice, guidance, and bespoke support**.

We are here to help new ideas get off the ground, help charities and groups to set up or grow, and help organisations put in place the structures, funding, and people they need to be successful.

Getting started is easy – all you need to do is complete our [support request form](#) and one of our team will contact you to discuss the bespoke help we can provide.

If you would prefer to talk to someone first or would like some help filling in the form, please email info@communityimpactbucks.org.uk or call 0330 236 9350 and one of our team will call you back within one working day.



For further information about any issues raised in this guide please contact:

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