**Starting a Support Group**

**What Do We Mean By Group?**

A group can be a number of individuals just getting together on a regular basis for a chat. It may be that the group wants be more formalised, and therefore they would start a voluntary or community group. Once it has been agreed to formalise the group various decisions have to be made.

This simple guide covers the things you need to consider when setting up a community group or project.  These stages do not always follow a logical step by step process. Very often you will need to make several decisions all at once and some of the ‘stages’ will need to happen simultaneously.

**Is it Possible?**

Now that you have made the decision about starting the voluntary group you have a fair idea about what your group wants to do. **BUT DO YOU?**

When you get down to the nitty gritty of deciding the objectives and actions of the group it might not be quite that easy! It is important to set your organisation realistic goals that you can achieve, don't set your sights too high at the beginning.

You may have to make decisions about how the group is going to be funded to achieve its aims. (See Finance and Funding Sections in this Toolkit).

You may wish to have what is considered a business plan put into place. This may sound complicated, however if you consider the next few questions you will find it easier than you thought. (See business plan template within this toolkit or contact SVE for support). A business plan can will help you consider what your group wants to do and whether it is possible.

**Can we do It?**

When starting a group there are four main points to consider, before you can progress.

1. **Do you have a clear idea of what you want to achieve?**

Will the group be long term, or short-term to achieve a one off project?

1. **What powers would you like your group to have?**

Do you want to be an unincorporated or incorporated group? Will you require charitable status? Do you want to affiliate yourself to a larger organisation? How will the Management Committee make decisions?

1. **What commitment will be required of group members?**

Things to think about, - time, effort, motivation, support for individuals.

1. **Do you have enough members?**

Do your members possess the relevant skills? Is the group agreed on the aims and objectives of the organisation? Will the group work well together?

Once you have decided what type of group you are going to set up and thought about the capacity of the group it is advisable to write a constitution.

Not all groups require a constitution but having one can clarify how your organisation will work and what you want to achieve.

Take time writing your constitution. If you apply for charitable status there may be legal requirements to fulfill if you want to alter your group's constitution. Support is available from SVE to draft your constitution; there is also a template constitution within this toolkit.

**Types of Group**

There are many different types of groups.

These include

* **Independent Groups**

This type of group can make all its own decisions without having to refer to anyone else.

* **Semi-independent Groups**

This type of group can make a limited number of decisions and is usually controlled by a larger organisation.

* **Recreational Groups**

The purpose of this type of group is merely to provide entertainment, pastimes, hobbies etc. for its membership.

* **Advisory Groups**

This type of group exists only to advise or report to groups or individuals.

* **Mixed Purpose**

For example a support group which facilitates social events but also provides advice and information to those who request it.

* **Umbrella Organisations**

Third Sector Interfaces are an example of umbrella organisations that represents the interests of their local voluntary sector.

Third Sector Interfaces provide comprehensive services to voluntary groups and organisations, whether you have just started, or have been established for years. Do not hesitate to contact us for support, advice and information.