

## STARTING A GROUP

### WHY START A GROUP?

Groups or individuals usually start a voluntary organisation because they have identified a gap in provision available. The organisation can be purely for the benefit of its members or have wider remit to include the general public. It would be impossible to list all types of groups—they are vast and varied eg. youth groups, older people groups, environmental groups, disability groups, etc.

Even just thinking about starting a voluntary group, for whatever reason, you will have a fair idea about what you want to do. ***But do you?***

### IS IT POSSIBLE?

When you get down to the nitty gritty of deciding the objectives and actions of the group it might not be 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. Make sure that you can access adequate finance to achieve what your organisation wants. Also make sure that there are enough people wanting to access the services of your group.

Naturally this will not apply to every group but will depend on the type of group - eg. A small hill-walking group will require less development planning than a group trying to establish a local community centre. Either way it is important to consider all possibilities. It might be useful to write a brief 'business plan'. It will help you consider what your group wants to do and whether it is feasible.

### GROUP CAPACITY

When starting a group there are four main issues to consider about the capacity of your organisation - basically if the group will be able to cope with the processes ahead.

1. **Do you have a clear idea about what you want to achieve?** Will the group be permanent or short term to achieve a one off project?
2. **What powers would you like your group to have?** Do you need to have a formal constitution? Will you require charitable status? Do you want to affiliate yourself to a larger organisation? How will you make decisions?
3. **What commitment will be required of group members?** Is this level of commitment possible and can it be sustained?
4. **Do you have enough members?** Do your members possess the relevant skills? Is the group agreed on the aims of the organisation? Will the group work well together?



**ALLOW TIME TO DEVELOP**

When groups are working together they often go through four distinct stages.

- a) **Forming** - when they begin a committee or group is often just individuals with a common interest and no collective identity or established working practice.
- b) **Storming** - working patterns are new and constantly challenged.
- c) **Norming** - establishing accepted patterns of work and behaviour which will be passed on to new members and become part of the culture of the way the group works.
- d) **Performing** - with all of that out of the way, the group can now do what it was formed to do and becomes productive.

Information on this page is taken from [www.elvon.org.uk](http://www.elvon.org.uk)  
the website of the East Lothian Voluntary Organisations Network

